



The sustainable development policies of Wallonia, North Rhine-Westphalia and North Holland

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October 2011 – Working Paper n° 25

Het Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling is een van de veertien steunpunten voor beleidsrelevant onderzoek die door de Vlaamse Regering zijn opgericht in januari 2007. De steunpunten verrichten zowel kortlopend als langlopend onderzoek, relevant voor verschillende beleidsdomeinen. Het Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling is samengesteld uit vier onderzoeksgroepen van drie universiteiten (GEGSD-KUL, HIVA-KUL, MEKO-VUB en CDO-UGent).

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1. Introduction

In project 3, the sustainable development policy of Flanders is systematically compared with that of Wallonia, North Rhine-Westphalia, North Holland and Quebec. Previously, Working Paper n° 23 offered a detailed ‘within-case’ analysis of Flanders and Quebec, and advanced first elements of a ‘cross-case’ analysis between those two cases (Happaerts, 2011b). The present paper completes the analysis of the separate cases studies, by discussing the sustainable development policies of Wallonia, North Rhine-Westphalia and North Holland.

Those three cases were already mentioned in different ways in previous research. Working Paper n° 20 presented a first analysis of the Walloon case, but put the emphasis mostly on the process of the institutionalization of sustainable development in Wallonia, and less on the content of the current sustainable development policy (Happaerts, 2010b). The cases of North Rhine-Westphalia and North Holland have not been presented in detail before, but elements of their sustainable development policies were touched upon in Working Paper n° 15 and Working Paper n° 18 (Happaerts, 2010a; Happaerts and Van den Brande, 2010).

The case studies in this paper are discussed following the analytical framework presented before (see Happaerts, 2011b). The analysis of each case proceeds in five steps:

1. the institutionalization of sustainable development;
2. policy framing;
3. policy goals;
4. policy instruments and
5. explanatory factors.

The first part gives a short historical overview of how sustainable development came onto the political agenda of the subnational governments. The three subsequent sections focus on the content of the sustainable development policies, and analyzes how the policy is framed, which goals are defined by the government, and which instruments are put in place to achieve those goals. Finally, the factors that explain the choices made in the sustainable development policies are explored: international influence, degree of autonomy, political context and socioeconomic conditions. More information on those different analytical categories can be found in Happaerts (2011b: 3-9).

This paper concludes the analysis of the case studies of project 3.¹ In the coming months, the project result in a final paper, which will outline the main policy-relevant lessons for Flanders that can be drawn from the comparative analysis.

2. The sustainable development policy of Wallonia

2.1 Institutionalization of sustainable development

In the mid-1990s, Wallonia was one of the first subnational governments in Europe to pay attention to the concept of sustainable development (cf. Zaccai and Bauler, 2005: 159). Nevertheless, although many initiatives have been taken since then, those did not lead to an institutionalization until very recently. The different efforts that were made to integrate sustainable development into Walloon policy-making have followed two tracks of governance. As a first track, different actors have tried to issue a sustainable development strategy (SDS) or a sustain-

¹ The complete cross-case analysis, as well as the academic results, are documented in the PhD dissertation that results from this project (Happaerts, 2011a).

able development plan, which the federal government or other entities have done in Belgium. As a second track of governance, different attempts have been made to integrate sustainable development into the government's transversal economic strategies. This section traces the main chronological events leading up to the institutionalization of sustainable development in Wallonia, while paying attention to those two tracks.²

2.1.1 Early pledges for sustainable development

In the aftermath of the Rio Summit, Wallonia made an effort to reorient its environmental policy in the direction of sustainable development. It did so through the adoption in 1994 of the Decree on Environmental Planning in the Framework of Sustainable Development (*Décret relatif à la planification en matière d'environnement dans le cadre du développement durable*). The Decree vaguely states that sustainable development needs to be taken into account at the level of the Walloon government, but it did not provide concrete instruments to do so (Parlement wallon, 1994). The Decree transformed the former Walloon Environment Council, a multistakeholder advisory body on environmental issues, into a Walloon Environment Council for Sustainable Development (CWEDD, *Conseil wallon de l'environnement pour le développement durable*). It also ordained the development of the Environment Plan for Sustainable Development (PEDD, *Plan d'environnement pour le développement durable*), which was published in 1995. Although the PEDD contained an important conceptual discussion on sustainable development (cf. infra), the actions that it proposed did not transcend the environmental realm.

A new impulse for sustainable development came after the 1999 elections. Those elections - which were held simultaneously for the European, federal and subnational parliaments in Belgium - were a breakthrough for the Francophone Green party (Écolo), which entered in a coalition with Socialists (PS) and Liberals (PRL) at both the federal and the Walloon level (see Table 1).

²

This historical overview is based on research documented by Happaerts (2012b).

Table 1 Governments in Wallonia since 1995³

Political term	Coalition	Prime Minister	Sustainable Development Minister	Environment Minister
1995-1999	PS-PSC	Robert Collignon (PS)	Guy Lutgen (PSC)	
1999-2004	PS-PRL-Écolo	Elio Di Rupo (PS) as of 2000: Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe (PS)	Michel Foret (PRL)	
2004-2009	PS-cdH	Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe (PS) as of 2005: Elio Di Rupo (PS) as of 2007: Rudy Demotte (PS)	Benoît Lutgen (cdH)	
Since 2009	PS-Écolo-cdH	Rudy Demotte (PS)	Jean-Marc Nollet (Écolo)	Philippe Henry (Écolo)

For the first time, sustainable development was mentioned in the government's opening address to parliament.⁴ The declaration stated that the Walloon government would issue a sustainable development plan "in the spirit of the Rio Conference" (Parlement wallon, 1999: 6, 27, own translation). That inclusion was made at the demand of the Greens. The promise, however, remained dead letter. A reason might be that at the Walloon level, the Green party was numerically unnecessary to form a majority. The inclusion of the Greens was done out of a concern for political symmetry, in order to rule with the same majority as at the federal level, where the Greens were a numerical necessity (Deschouwer, 2000: 129). Although they succeeded in introducing sustainable development in the coalition agreement in Wallonia, the Greens failed to force their coalition partners to live up to their promise. No concrete initiatives for a sustainable development policy were taken during the 1999-2004 term. In the Walloon parliament a few debates, initiated by Green representatives, were held to discuss the desirability of a sustainable development plan, but the idea to issue such a plan was rejected by the other coalition partners. The Socialists and Liberals were of the opinion that with the Future Contract, the government's transversal economic strategy, they already had a sustainable development plan in place (Parlement wallon, 2002a; b; 2003).

The Future Contract was the first of a series of transversal, high-level strategies of economic development that the Walloon government has issued since 1999. Those strategies intend to give Wallonia the new economic stimulus that it desperately needs. Indeed, while the southern Belgian entity was characterized by vast industrial prosperity during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, its economic situation has been deteriorating since the late 1950s and the 1960s (Accaputo et al., 2006: 8; Reid and Musyck, 2000: 183-184). Over the past decades, its economic growth has been beneath European averages, and it has had a structurally higher unemployment rate than the other Belgian entities (Bayenet and Vandendorpe, 2006: 15). The main cause is the crisis of the Walloon coal sector and heavy industry, but

³ The main Liberal party was named the PRL, until it merged with some smaller formations into the MR in 2002. In the same year, the Christian Democrat PSC changed its name to cdH. Table 1 distinguishes between the minister controlling the Environment portfolio and the minister formally responsible for sustainable development as from 2009. As I will show, sustainable development (informally) belonged to the Environment portfolio before 2009.

⁴ In contrast to Flanders, the Walloon government does not develop sectoral policy notes (Vancoppenolle and Legrain, 2003). The only strategic document that contains the policy intentions of a coalition, is the opening address to parliament (*Déclaration de politique régionale*), which reflects the coalition agreement.

observers also invoke other factors, such as a bad image with investors, the overdevelopment of the public sector and a lack of entrepreneurial spirit (Accaputo et al., 2006: 15-18; Mignolet, 2006: 95; Reid and Musyck, 2000: 187-188). Economic revival has thus been the top priority of Walloon governments since the instauration of federalism in Belgium.⁵ In addition, the transversal strategies that were launched as from 1999 try to endow Wallonia with an overarching 'Walloon' project, since the lack of an internally coherent Walloon identity is invoked as a structural obstacle towards Wallonia's resurgence (Van Asbrouck, 2005: 52; Willame, 2006: 105-106).⁶

The Future Contract (*Contrat d'avenir pour la Wallonie*) was launched by the government in 1999. Its subtitle was 'An active and solidary Wallonia on the path of sustainable development' (*Une Wallonie active et solidaire sur la voie du développement durable*) (Gouvernement wallon, 2000).⁷ It was an economic strategy with a dominant focus on jobs and entrepreneurship (cf. Accaputo et al., 2006: 22), but also proposed actions on social and environmental matters. Moreover, much emphasis was given to the principles of participation and good governance, because the Future Contract wanted to initiate a new way of governing in Wallonia and to make a rupture with the past. Because of the inclusion of the concept of sustainable development in the Future Contract, the Socialist and Liberal coalition partners stated that Wallonia already had a transversal strategy for sustainable development (Parlement wallon, 2002a: 19; 2002b: 28; 2003: 33).⁸ They thus regarded another plan or strategy as useless, and the Greens' attempts to take such an initiative were blocked. The fact that in 2002 Environment Minister Foret (of the Liberal party) was present in Johannesburg and signed the Gauteng Declaration, had no resonance in Wallonia.

2.1.2 The failed attempt for a Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy

After the 2004 elections, the Green party - back in the opposition - proposed a law to issue a sustainable development plan (Parlement wallon, 2004b). According to that proposition, the plan would be a consequence of a revision of the 1994 Decree. Yet the proposition was never allowed on the parliamentary agenda.

Action by the government was in the first place triggered by a national initiative. In 2004, the federal State Secretary for Sustainable Development wanted to negotiate a national SDS (see also Happaerts, 2010a). While the different governments failed to conclude a real agreement, the negotiations produced a framework text proclaiming good intentions (IMCDO 2005). Although that text does not call for concrete actions to be taken by the subnational governments, it did incite Wallonia to take an initiative. Interviews clearly show that Walloon policy-makers

⁵ The creation of territorial Regions with economic competences (parallel to language Communities with cultural competences) was a specific demand of Walloon politicians (Swenden and Jans, 2006: 881), driven by the belief that their specific economic problems were best dealt with at the subnational level.

⁶ On the historical development, the political construction and the weakness of the Walloon identity, see Billiet et al. (2006) and Lecours (2001).

⁷ It is said that the subtitle of the Future Contract contained something to please each one of the Socialist, Liberal and Green coalition partners, in stressing 'solidarity', 'activity' and 'sustainable development' respectively.

⁸ Ironically, that interpretation is contradicted by the Future Contract itself, which repeated the promise made in the coalition agreement that a sustainable development plan would be issued (Gouvernement wallon, 2000: 22).

interpret the negotiations as a formal request to develop a SDS for Wallonia.⁹ During the intra-Belgian negotiations, the Walloon government formally decided that the responsibility for sustainable development rested with its Environment Minister, and requested that he would develop a Walloon SDS (WSDS).

In 2006, Environment Minister Lutgen contracted a consultancy firm to draft the WSDS.¹⁰ Yet it soon became clear that the time and means that he had foreseen were grossly insufficient to produce a comprehensive strategy with objectives and actions, even more so because the process intended to comprise several consultation rounds with representatives from the Walloon administration and different stakeholders. Interviewees point out that many difficulties were experienced when the firm encroached on domains where other (sectoral) strategies were already operational. Because of those constraints, the Minister decided that the contract would be limited to drafting a first phase of the WSDS, consisting of an inventory of existing plans and the development of general sustainable development goals for Wallonia. After a year, the firm produced a text containing an exhaustive introduction on sustainable development, the identification of seven themes (copied from the second EUSDS), four governance principles and three transversal tools (Ministère de la Région wallonne, 2007). The document was approved by the Walloon government in the summer of 2007 without any political debate. It was also agreed that a second phase would equip the WSDS with a real action plan. However, seven months passed before a new initiative was taken and before another team was contracted to draft the second phase.¹¹ When the team started, the 2009 subnational elections were only a year away, and by the time the draft was finalized, the election campaign was in full swing. The action plan that was produced, contained strategic mid-term goals and concrete short-term actions for each of the seven themes. Since it contained real commitments, it could not be adopted without a political discussion. Interviewees indicate, however, that such a debate was impossible because all ministers were already in a campaigning mood. The government thus failed to adopt the second phase of the WSDS.

Many observers and interviewees have uttered heavy critique on the development of the WSDS (e.g. CESRW 2007; CSWCN 2007; CWEDD 2007). They denounce, for instance, that the Environment department was the only administration actively involved in the process. The other administrations and the cabinets of the other ministers did not cooperate, although the Environment Minister invited them to do so. Moreover, no political debates took place on the formulation or adoption of the WSDS. While some of those difficulties can be attributed to the poor timing of the process, they are certainly a symptom of the low political weight attached to the WSDS. It is also revealing that the proposed strategy never received any public attention.

Also during the 2004-2009 term, Environment Minister Lutgen took another initiative for sustainable development. He contracted a consultancy firm to develop a sustainable development impact assessment tool (Parlement wallon, 2005; 2006c: 11). The tool consisted of a sim-

⁹ That interpretation was later shared by the Belgian Court of Audit (Cour des comptes, 2010). Flanders, however, does not share that view and never invoked the negotiations on a national SDS to legitimize the Flemish SDS.

¹⁰ The government solicited a proposal from five consultancy firms and eventually selected CAP Conseil, a small Walloon firm specializing in sustainable development and corporate social responsibility (Parlement wallon, 2006a; b).

¹¹ After a call for tenders, the contract was assigned to a joint team of EcoRes, a sustainable development consultancy bureau, and Institut Destrée, a Walloon research centre. The texts developed for the second phase were never made publicly (nor privately) available.

ple list of questions aimed at giving an indication whether a particular decision would have a positive or negative impact with regard to sustainable development. After the tool had been developed, there was an intention to link it to the draft WSDS. Yet the tool was never operationalized, and the Environment Minister never introduced it to the government or to the administration.

At the time when the WSDS was being developed, the government focused most of its attention to the successor of the Future Contract. The latter had appeared to be more of a communication tool than an action plan, and was criticized to propose too many disparate actions without a clear vision or financial support behind it (cf. Bayenet and Vandendorpe, 2006: 12). In 2005, the president of the Socialist party and former Walloon Prime Minister Di Rupo launched the idea of a 'Marshall Plan' for Wallonia (in reference to the American aid programme for Europe after the Second World War). The tenor of the initiative was unmistakable: things in Wallonia were bad and a major effort was needed to curve the trend. But besides the dire economic situation, the political instability in Belgium also played a role. The Francophone political parties anticipated that after the 2007 federal elections, the Flemish parties would demand a new state reform with more economic powers and fiscal autonomy for the subnational entities, and they wanted to prepare Wallonia to stand on its own feet with regard to economic policy (Accaputo et al., 2006: 25-26; Lechat, 2005: 38-39). The Marshall Plan intended to spend 1 billion EUR on several actions within five priority axes, not transcending the economic realm. It also called for a complete mobilization of all economic actors in Wallonia (Accaputo et al., 2006). In contrast to the Future Contract, sustainable development was completely absent from the discourse of the Marshall Plan. Moreover, the Marshall Plan was absolutely disconnected from the development of the WSDS.

2.1.3 A new climate for sustainable development

A new momentum emerged as a result of the 2009 subnational elections. They produced a remarkable result in Wallonia, with an unseen victory for the Greens - who went from 8.5% to 18.5% - and negative scores for all other parties (Blaise et al., 2009). While the elections were heavily marked by the global financial and economic crisis, and by an ongoing political stalemate in Belgium,¹² the election campaign of the Green party focused on political renewal and on the 'green economy' as a response to the crisis (Écolo, 2009). A coalition of Socialists, Greens and Christian Democrats was formed, leaving only the Liberals in the opposition (see Table 1). The coalition agreement shows a clear commitment to sustainable development, due to the Greens' strong bargaining position (as opposed to 1999) and due to a generally growing awareness of environmental problems in that period, especially climate change.¹³ The title of the government's inaugural declaration was 'A shared energy for a sustainable, humane and solidary society' (*Une énergie partagée pour une société durable, humaine et solidaire*) and it expresses the intention of promoting sustainable development into all policies (Parlement wallon, 2009). For the first time, sustainable development was explicitly assigned to a particular Minister, i.e. Vice Prime Minister Nollet of the Green party.

At the very start of the political term, the proposed law to issue a sustainable development plan, deposited by the Greens in 2004 (cf. supra), was deposited again. But most importantly,

¹² The 2007 federal elections were followed by a long period of political instability at the federal level, mainly as a result of diverging views between Flemish and Francophone parties with regard to a state reform.

¹³ Besides the economic crisis, the elections were also held in the run-up to the highly mediatised COP 15 of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen.

the Green party used all of its bargaining power to ‘green’ as much as possible the government’s new transversal economic strategy - since its main critique on the first Marshall Plan was that it remained silent on the issue of sustainable development (Accaputo et al., 2006: 65) - thus giving body to the second track of governance for sustainable development (cf. supra). The result is the Marshall Plan 2.Green (*Plan Marshall 2.vert*). It is an ambitious successor of the first Marshall Plan, supported by 1.62 billion EUR (which is complemented with 1.15 billion EUR of private funding). The Plan is centred around six priority axes and guided by two transversal dynamics, one of which is sustainable development.¹⁴ The concept of sustainable development is omnipresent throughout the entire Marshall Plan 2.Green. In addition, in order to concretize the transversal dynamic, the Plan puts aside 5.25 million EUR to “transversally promote sustainable development across all public policies” (Wallonie, 2010: 48, own translation), thus proceeding towards the institutionalization of a transversal sustainable development policy. Several instruments are envisaged (cf. infra), but at the time of writing most actions still have to be implemented. A first concrete step towards the implementation of the policy, was the initiative by the secretariat-general of the Walloon administration to develop a Sustainable Development Plan and to established a Sustainable Development Working Group (cf. infra).

At the time when several initiatives were announced by the coalition agreement and by the Marshall Plan 2.Green, and when a few steps were already taken by the Minister and the administration, additional pressure was exerted upon the government by an external actor. In the summer of 2010, the Belgian Court of Audit¹⁵ decided to inquire into the absence of a SDS, in the light of the coalition’s high ambitions on sustainable development. In its report, the Court emphasized the necessity of a SDS for Wallonia, for two main reasons. On the one hand, the Court stated that Wallonia is legally bound to issue an SDS, because of its international commitments (e.g. the Gauteng Declaration), and because of the Belgian context, i.e. art. 7bis of the Belgian Constitution (see Happaerts, 2011b: 48) and the framework text for a Belgian national SDS (cf. supra). According to the Court, Wallonia risks serious damage to its image, both in Belgium and internationally, if it does not live up to that promise (Cour des comptes, 2010: 14-15). On the other hand, the Court denounced the poor coherence of the different plans and policies of the government, and the lack of rigour in Wallonia’s general planning approach (Cour des comptes, 2010: 22; Parlement wallon, 2011: 18). The report thus concluded that a SDS is the missing link between the high ambitions of the current coalition, and the varied initiatives that are taken for sustainable development (Parlement wallon, 2011: 18). In response to the report, Sustainable Development Minister Nollet announced that he would advance the issue within the government and propose a framework to develop a real Walloon SDS (Cour des comptes, 2010: 44), which will probably exceed the scope of the Sustainable Development Plan prepared by the administration (Parlement wallon, 2011: 27).

¹⁴ The other transversal dynamic is aimed at enhancing public partnership and promoting a Walloon identity (cf. infra). The six priority axes are human capital, competitiveness clusters and business networks, scientific research, creating businesses and quality jobs, employment-environment alliances, and combining employment and social well-being (Wallonie, 2010).

¹⁵ Similar to the Auditor General in state systems of the Westminster model, the Belgian Court of Audit is an independent organ that audits the federal, subnational and provincial governments in Belgium, and that reports directly to the parliament.

2.2 Policy framing

2.2.1 The ecological interpretation of sustainable development

When Wallonia, as one of the first subnational governments in Europe, put sustainable development on the agenda with the 1994 Decree, no definition of the concept was given. The Decree merely stated that environmental planning should take into account “the dimension of sustainable development” (Parlement wallon, 1994: §1, own translation). It also referred to the principles and outcome documents of Rio and to the EU’s sustainable development activities (Parlement wallon, 1994: §4, §9). Interviews and internal documents indeed show that the Walloon government regularly stressed that it is bound by the outcome documents of the Rio Summit (through the Belgian signature of them) and that it fully endorses those commitments. Subsequently, the PEDD that was approved in 1995 contained an important conceptual discussion on sustainable development. It endorsed the Brundtland definition, and emphasized the need for new modes of development, which would take into account environmental challenges and the wellbeing of current and future generations. In the PEDD, the government also emphasized that the concept of sustainable development is compatible with economic growth, but that it requires a change of prevailing growth models (Gouvernement wallon, 1995: 7). Although the 1994 Decree demanded the renewal of the PEDD every five years, the Plan has never been revised. Formally, the PEDD is still in force, although after seventeen years it has no more political relevance. Nevertheless, some interviewees stated that the PEDD’s conceptual discussion of sustainable development is still the only official reference on the notion that they have in Wallonia.

Although the policy framing put forward in the PEDD stresses the reconciliation of environmental concerns and economic growth, the application of the concept since the mid-1990s has been strictly environmental. The 1994 Decree stimulated the creation of ‘hybrid’ institutions, i.e. they had ‘sustainable development’ in their name, but were of a purely environmental nature (cf. Thunis, 2000: 10). The PEDD, as explained before, was an environmental policy plan which foresaw environmental measures only. Also, the CWEDD, despite its change of name (cf. *supra*), remained an advisory council with an environmental mandate. That is not to say, however, that the introduction of sustainable development in the policy discourse was meaningless. Interviewees suggest that it stimulated thinking in the spirit of sustainable development, and was helpful in conducting a more comprehensive environmental policy. Therefore, the Decree and the PEDD reoriented Wallonia’s *environmental* policy towards *environmental sustainability*, but it failed to institutionalize sustainable development as such.

Wallonia thus adopted an ecological interpretation of sustainable development in the mid-1990s, and that policy framing became hard to get rid of. Because of the framing, no separate institutional structure was ever established for sustainable development, and the issue became and remained a concern for the Environment department only.¹⁶ As a consequence, there was never any stimulus to take a transversal initiative on sustainable development, which only gave the ecological interpretation further support. That self-reinforcing dynamic was one of the reasons of the failure of the WSDS project before 2009, which was led by the Environment Minister and supported only by the Environment department. Despite the definition advanced by the PEDD, it appears that there was no understanding that sustainable development could

¹⁶ The lack of an institutional structure for sustainable development was felt as an impediment towards frequent participation of Walloon representatives in national and international decision-making processes. When Wallonia participated, it was only represented by officials from the Environment administration.

transcend the realm of environmental policy, or no political will to permit it to do so. Indeed, interviews reveal that some stakeholder groups would be willing to support another environmental sustainability plan (as a successor to the PEDD), but not a plan that would lift sustainable development beyond its environmental frame. The ecological interpretation was thus not a matter of historical developments alone, it had supporters who were happy that sustainable development was confined to an environmental policy framing.

The law that was proposed by the Greens in 2004 and never put on the parliamentary agenda (cf. supra), was precisely meant to disentangle the conceptual knot created in the 1990s. It wanted to revise the 1994 Decree, replace the existing PEDD by a real sustainable development plan, and create an advisory council specifically for sustainable development. By replacing the hybrid institutions with proper ones, the Greens wanted a sustainable development plan “in the spirit of the Rio Conference which integrates the social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions, in contrast to the previous plan” (Parlement wallon, 2002a: 17, own translation). In doing so, Wallonia would adopt some of the measures that had already been taken at the federal level in Belgium. Interviewees confirm that the Greens explicitly referred to the institutions at the federal level, because some of those had been put in place by the federal coalition of Liberals, Socialists and Greens (between 1999 and 2003). The Greens (wrongly) believed that the same Socialists and Liberals could thus hardly refuse a similar design at the Walloon level.

2.2.2 Gradually opening up the environmental focus

Since 1999, when the Green party was first included in the coalition, several attempts have been made to advance a different policy framing for sustainable development. The first attempt was visible in the government’s opening address to parliament, which stated that “after the incredible industrial florescence in the previous century, we have to construct a model of sustainable development for the next century” (Parlement wallon, 1999: 4, own translation). Sustainable development was also introduced in the discourse of the Future Contract (cf. supra), which complemented the Brundtland formulation advanced by the PEDD with the three-pillar vision:

“The sustainable development of Wallonia implies a concern for the quality of growth. It aims at an improvement of conditions of life through a priority response to the essential needs of the most deprived and through the access for all to a healthy environment now and in the future. In that approach, the emphasis is put on the indispensable complementarities in the social, economic and environmental domains and on the need to find a balance between them when they enter into conflict” (Gouvernement wallon, 2000: 7, own translation).

The inclusion of this definition in the Future Contract shows the willingness to integrate sustainable development in the government’s main economic strategy, but it has already been mentioned that those promises were never put into action. In practice, therefore, the ecological interpretation of sustainable development remained dominant.

In the 2004 coalition agreement, the Socialists and Christian Democrats adopted sustainable development as one of their governance principles. According to them, that meant that all important public decisions needed to be assessed with regard to their economic, social and envi-

ronmental impact (Parlement wallon, 2004a: 33). Yet also in their case, no actions followed.¹⁷ In framing sustainable development, the text of the first phase of the WSDS was inspired by the PEDD, and put the emphasis on the need to change current modes of development (as a consequence of environmental degradation, the depletion of fossil fuels, and the inequalities caused by globalization) (Ministère de la Région wallonne, 2007: 4). Yet the WSDS was never endorsed and the simultaneous Marshall Plan only paid attention to economic development. It showed, once again, the inability to overcome the ecological interpretation of sustainable development.

A breakthrough in the policy framing was finally realized by the return to power of the Green party in 2009. Sustainable development became the leading concept of the coalition agreement and the Marshall Plan 2.Green. Supported by a political climate that was favourable to environmental concerns (cf. *supra*), the Green party helped sustainable development to break out of its environmental chains and receive a more integrative policy framing, with the objective to transversally integrate sustainable development into all policy-making. Before 2009, sustainable development was unable to overcome the ‘economy versus environment debate’. But after 2009, the emphasis on the concept of ‘green economy’ suggests that the reconciliation of environmental and economic concerns became possible. That is also visible in Wallonia’s emerging governance model.

2.2.3 Governance model

The discussion above shows that the governance model of sustainable development was clearly based on a ‘default’ ecological interpretation since the 1990s. Recently, however, it is shifting towards a holistic approach. That is marked by the 2009 coalition agreement, which stated that “the sustainable development of Wallonia, which unites the economic, social, environmental and cultural challenges in an integrated way, must be applied in a transversal manner in all Regional policies” (Parlement wallon, 2009: 28, own translation), which was repeated in the Marshall Plan 2.Green. The coalition agreement expressed a commitment to a transversal approach to policy-making - not only on sustainable development, but in general - which should symbolize a political renewal in the south of Belgium.

While the governance model was never made explicit by the government, recent policy choices demonstrate the move towards a holistic model. Most importantly, the government for the first time assigned sustainable development to a particular minister. It was not assigned to the Prime Minister himself, but to Vice Prime Minister Nollet. It is not only the first time that the issue has an official ‘guardian’, it is also the first time that it does not (in)formally belong to the Environment minister (see Table 1). It marks a rupture with the past and expresses the willingness to move the concept beyond its environmental frame. At the time of analysis, it is still not very clear what the precise content of the Sustainable Development Minister’s assignment is, but at the start of the term Nollet seemed to interpret it mostly in the context of his other responsibilities, the most important of which are Energy, Public Administration and Housing (cf. *infra*). It thus seems that, for the time being, ‘Sustainable Development’ is an important symbolic competence that Nollet has been given, rather than a concrete one. The fact that the Sustainable Development Minister is also the guardian minister of Public Administration, favoured the initiative taken for sustainable development by the secretariat-general of the

¹⁷ The development of a sustainable development impact assessment tool, as proposed by Minister Lutgen, would have been the concretization of that governance principle, but the tool was never put into practice (cf. *supra*).

Walloon administration, who now takes the lead on sustainable development issues instead of the Environment department. It underscores the rupture made in 2009, and puts an end to the era in which sustainable development was a default concern of the Environment administration.

2.2.4 Concluding remarks

Although Wallonia's governance model is not yet clearly defined, its ongoing shift is illustrative of the changed policy framing of sustainable development. Policy choices made in the mid-1990s attached an ecological interpretation to the concept. Although references to the Brundtland definition and the three pillars were frequent from the outset, all initiatives that were taken did not exceed the scope of environmental policy. With the return to power of the Green party in 2009, and aided by the discourse on a 'green economy', a growing preference for a holistic policy framing is noticeable. It underscores the government's willingness to interpret sustainable development as an intrinsic part of Wallonia's resurgence and overall socio-economic development.

2.3 Policy goals

This section and the next focus on the goals and instruments of the government's current sustainable development policy, as it is being institutionalized since 2009. Most policy goals are put forward by the coalition agreement and the Marshall Plan 2.Green. The empirical analysis for the Walloon case was finalized in March 2011, so subsequent developments could not be taken into account.

2.3.1 Strategic policy goals

When sustainable development made its breakthrough as a political issue in Wallonia in 2009, it immediately became one of the most prominent strategic goals for policy-making. The government's coalition agreement and the Marshall Plan 2.Green illustrate the willingness to promote sustainable development as a transversal concept (Biélande, 2009). That strategic policy goal is manifested in four main areas. First, sustainable development has become the guiding dynamic of Wallonia's new economic strategy. In choosing that second track of governance for sustainable development, the government wants to unite its pursuit of sustainable development with the necessary transition of its troubled economy (Parlement wallon, 2009: 15). According to the Sustainable Development Minister, the Marshall Plan 2.Green is the perfect example of how the government intends to assure that all new decisions and initiatives contribute to sustainable development (Biélande, 2009). As a second field, indeed, the coalition wants to promote sustainable development in all actions and policies of Wallonia's public actors (Parlement wallon, 2009: 28). With its focus on the public sphere, the government wants to link its sustainable development policy with its concern for 'good governance', which in 2009 was an important theme during the election campaign in Wallonia, after a series of scandals involving high-profile politicians.¹⁸ Third, in addition to the public sphere, the government wants to encourage private companies to take sustainable development into account (Parlement wallon, 2009:

¹⁸ During the 2009 elections in Wallonia, citizens with a low level of trust in political institutions were more inclined to vote for the Green party. In Flanders, although the level of political trust is generally higher, those voters more often turn to far-right or populist parties, which do not exist in Wallonia (Hooghe et al., 2011).

32). And fourth, sustainable development is prominently advanced as a theme that should be publicly supported in scientific research (Parlement wallon, 2009: 50).

Besides sustainable development as a strategic goal, the current coalition emphasizes two other general strategic goals which are important to mention here. Although they are not specific to the sustainable development policy, they accompany the government's new support for the policy concept. Firstly, the coalition intends to turn Wallonia into a role model of good governance (Parlement wallon, 2009: 28, 129). That ambition is a consequence of the broad awareness of the reportedly bad image of Wallonia, not only in the political context of Belgium, but also with foreign investors (cf. *supra*). The intention of becoming a role model is often linked to sustainable development, as the government wants to "position Wallonia as spearhead of sustainable development at the European and global level" (Wallonie, 2010: 35, own translation), and since the "Walloon Region, in the capacity of public administration, must show the example in the promotion of sustainable development" (Parlement wallon, 2009: 36, own translation). The ambition to become a role model has already been used by external actors to put pressure on the government to take action on sustainable development, while using potential damage to Wallonia's image as the ultimate political threat (Cour des comptes, 2010: 19; Parlement wallon, 2011).

Secondly, another intended change is that the government wants to endow Wallonia with a more prominent Walloon identity. While the lack of such an identity was perceived as one of the structural obstacles towards Wallonia's economic resurgence (cf. *supra*), it could be important as a strategic goal in the context of sustainable development too. An enhanced feeling of identity is expected to increase the participation of citizens in transversal policy projects (Parlement wallon, 2009: 31; Wallonie, 2010: 50). A public information campaign to reinforce the Walloon identity was launched in 2010. The campaign did not mention the word 'identity' (although that was the initial intention, as interviewees confirm). Rather, it focused on the replacement of the denomination of 'Walloon Region' with 'Wallonia', and affirmed the government's commitment to promote Wallonia as an open entity and to increase its visibility (Gouvernement wallon, 2010). One of the objectives of the coalition is to strengthen Wallonia's participation in European and global decision-making forums, where it should promote sustainable development and campaign for a more equitable world (Parlement wallon, 2009: 124-125).

2.3.2 Operational policy goals

The operational goals of the sustainable development policy are mostly put forward by the Marshall Plan 2.Green. First of all, the goal to integrate sustainable development into all public policies corresponds with one of the Marshall Plan's two transversal dynamics. That dynamic consists of eight specific actions to be undertaken during the current political term, such as the establishment of a sustainable procurement policy, the sensitization of public personnel and the development of new indicators to complement the use of GDP (Wallonie, 2010: 48-49).¹⁹ Besides that transversal dynamic, the Marshall Plan 2.Green also formulates operational goals meant to stimulate the consideration of sustainable development in the private sector and in research, for instance by announcing the commitment to create a Walloon Institute for Sustainable Development, or the launch of a call for projects on sustainable development among companies (Wallonie, 2010: 15, 40-41), which responds to the Greens' critique that in the

¹⁹ Many of those actions have the ambition of becoming new policy instruments, but the intentions have not yet been implemented at the time of writing.

previous Marshall Plan, it was too hard for companies to gain access to funding when they proposed sustainable development projects. Some of the other goals of the Marshall Plan 2.Green - which are mostly economic - are also inspired by the pursuit of sustainable development, such as the investment in the 'employment-environment alliances', consisting of measures to support employment and formation in 'green' sectors, e.g. the renovation of old buildings. Those measures are explicitly intended to present an image of Wallonia as a role model with regard to sustainable development (Wallonie, 2010: 35).

2.3.3 Goal characteristics

2.3.3.1 Thematic areas of the goals

Although the Walloon sustainable development policy is still evolving, some choices regarding the thematic areas of the policy goals have clearly been made. First of all, most of the actions that are envisaged target the public administration, as the sustainable development component of the Marshall Plan 2.Green clearly shows. The focus on the public sphere is facilitated by the fact that the Sustainable Development Minister also holds the Public Administration portfolio. In line with the ambition to set the example, the Greens are convinced that the Walloon government controls enough important policy areas to make a difference with regard to sustainable development—especially considering the large share of competences that Wallonia enjoys (cf. Parlement wallon, 2002a: 17). Second, the sustainable development policy focuses to a large extent on crucial areas in the context of the fight against climate change. As the election campaign was held in the run-up to the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), climate change became the coalition's primary environmental concern (Parlement wallon, 2009: 60). For instance, the government vowed to defend an ambitious reduction target during the negotiations at Copenhagen (Parlement wallon, 2009: 29, 60; Wallonie, 2010: 49).²⁰ The fight against climate change was above all a priority of the Green party during the campaign, and Sustainable Development Minister Nollet now also controls the Energy portfolio. The coalition's sustainable development policy is frequently linked to measures taken by Minister Nollet in the area of energy and energy efficiency, for instance for government-owned buildings. Moreover, the Greens' have always stated that climate-friendly policies, as a prominent theme of the 'green economy', go hand in hand with job creation and economic development (Écolo, 2009). That is why the sustainable development component of the Marshall Plan 2.Green, in addition to its attention to the public sector, focuses on the 'employment-environment alliances' and on a new business cluster on environmental technologies (Wallonie, 2010: 1). There are very few policy goals targeted specifically at the social dimension of sustainable development. An exception is the goal to include not only environmental clauses in public tenders (in the context of a sustainable procurement policy), but also social and ethical clauses (Wallonie, 2010: 48). In conclusion, and as confirmed by interviewees, the choice of thematic areas for the goals of the sustainable development policy is mostly inspired, for the time being, by the specific portfolios controlled by the Sustainable Development Minister.

²⁰

At Copenhagen, the ambitious target promoted by Wallonia - but also by the federal and Brussels Environment Ministers - clashed with the more reserved position of Flanders, which made that Belgium was unable to adopt a clear position in the negotiations (Happaerts et al., 2012).

2.3.3.2 Specificity, timeframe and analysis of the situation

Some of the goals of the Walloon sustainable development policy are rather specific, most importantly the concrete actions on sustainable development proposed by the Marshall Plan 2.Green. However, the specificity of those goals is weakened by the vague character of the indicators that are attached to them. Throughout the Marshall Plan, all proposed actions are met with concrete, quantitative indicators. Interviewees explain that this is in accordance with an emerging new political culture in Wallonia to monitor governmental policies. Yet, the indicators attached to the sustainable development initiatives are rather vague, e.g. ‘projects in 20 public institutions’ (Wallonie, 2010: 49). It shows that, although a political consensus on those initiatives has been forged, there is still no agreement at the time of writing on how they should be achieved in practice. The Sustainable Development Opinion Unit is a case in point (cf. *infra*). It is interesting to repeat in this context that the development of new indicators²¹ (‘beyond GDP’) is an explicit goal of the sustainable development policy (Wallonie, 2010: 49).

As for the timing of the goals, it is clear that the current political term (2009-2014) is the main timeframe for the achievement of the sustainable development component of the Marshall Plan 2.Green. Wallonia does not have a long-term vision on sustainable development. In addition, an analysis of the situation is lacking. The coalition agreement merely stated that “achieving sustainable development in social cohesion imposes a lucid analysis of the deep causes of those financial, economic, social and environmental crises that affect us” (Parlement wallon, 2009: 15, own translation). In that regard, the coalition also admitted that certain historically rooted practices need to be revised, such as an exclusive focus on the short term, the exploitation of non renewable resources or the deregulated character of the market (Parlement wallon, 2009: 15).

2.3.3.3 Political and societal backing for the goals

The historical overview in section 2.1 has shown that a lack of political backing was among the reasons of the failure of previous attempts to institutionalize sustainable development in Wallonia. That analysis is echoed by Sustainable Development Minister Nollet, who states that those failed attempts are evidence of “difficulties to reconcile [...] visions of society that belong to different political tendencies” (Cour des comptes, 2010: 41, own translation). In the current political term, the commitment for sustainable development has not only been enshrined in the coalition agreement, but it also forms an intrinsic part of the Marshall Plan 2.Green, which is the number one priority project of the coalition as a whole. The Green party considers the Marshall Plan to be a strong guarantee that the other coalition partners will remain on board with regard to the sustainable development initiatives (Biélande, 2009). However, it needs to be pointed out here that, although it is clear that most of the sustainable development goals of the Marshall Plan 2.Green correspond with election promises made by the Green party (Écolo, 2009), also the other coalition partners had displayed significant discursive commitment to sustainable development in their election programmes (cdH, 2009; PS, 2009). Interviewees suggest that since the 2009 elections, the political backing for sustainable development in Wallonia broadened, due to a favourable international context and a changing political climate. Most interviewees stress a feeling of change after the 2009 elections.

With regard to the societal backing, it is insightful that the major advisory bodies in Wallonia, when asked to comment on the Marshall Plan’s sustainable development compo-

²¹ This issue is currently being discussed, after preparatory work by the Walloon Institute of Statistics (SPW 2011b: 164).

ment, indicated their surprise regarding the lack of reference to the previous government's attempt to develop the WSDS (CESRW 2009: 25; CWEDD 2009: 4). Furthermore, while the advisory bodies welcomed the attention for sustainable development in the Plan, the CWEDD denounced the insufficiency of the measures, stating that sustainable development must have an impact on all sectoral policies in Wallonia (CWEDD 2009: 4).

2.3.4 Concluding remarks

The analysis of the policy goals demonstrates that 2009 brought along a shift in many respects. Not only is sustainable development now being promoted as a transversal objective into all public policies, and into the government's new economic strategy. The government also expresses the ambition to excel in good governance and set the example for others, including with regard to sustainable development. The analysis has also revealed that the current sustainable development policy to a large extent, but not exclusively, corresponds with the sustainable development measures promised by the Marshall Plan 2.Green. However, in part because the effort to transversally institutionalize sustainable development is still very recent, many of the goal characteristics are rather weak.

2.4 Policy instruments

Since there has only been a successful attempt to institutionalize sustainable development in Wallonia in 2009, there is no extensive set of policy instruments to account for at the time of writing. This section analyzes the tools that do exist, and it comments, where relevant, on past or future attempts for other policy instruments for sustainable development.

2.4.1 Institutional instruments

The analysis already accounted for two failed attempts to launch institutional (including planning) instruments for sustainable development. The first was Environment Minister Lutgen's try to develop a sustainable development impact assessment tool; the second was the endeavour to draw up a WSDS consisting of a framework text and an action plan.

Also the current approach towards sustainable development is likely to rest in part on institutional instruments. As explained before, the Marshall Plan 2.Green is situated in an effort to present Wallonia as a front-runner of good governance, and to finish with its notoriously bad image in that regard. Hereafter, I present the only institutional instruments that have already been created and two of the intended instruments which should reflect the government's focus on good governance.

2.4.1.1 Sustainable Development Minister

As mentioned before, in 2009 sustainable development was for the first time officially assigned to one of the ministers of the Walloon government, i.e. Vice Prime Minister Nollet of the Green party. That particular choice was a consequence of the Greens' preference to assign the topic to a minister with a horizontal function (i.e. prime minister or vice prime minister, rather than Environment minister), but at the same they wanted one of their own representatives to be responsible for it.

2.4.1.2 Sustainable Development Working Group and Correspondents

In March 2010, the secretary-general of the Walloon administration established a Sustainable Development Working Group, which includes, under her chairmanship, representatives of

each directorate-general, of the Walloon Air and Climate Agency, and of the cabinet of the Sustainable Development Minister (Cour des comptes, 2010: 30; SPW 2011a: 20; 2011b: 162).²² The initiative was triggered by Nollet's request to develop a commuter traffic policy for the administration's employees, which is one of the operational goals of the Marshall Plan 2.Green (Wallonie, 2010: 49). Yet the secretary-general decided to upgrade the status of what was first to be a 'reflection group', and to preserve the Working Group as the coordination body for the development of a future Sustainable Development Plan too (cf. *infra*). In December 2010, three subgroups were created within the Working Group, focusing respectively on communication, on sustainable procurement and on mobility (SPW 2011a: 20). The latter, which guides the development of the administration's commuter traffic policy, also includes representatives of the cabinet of Environment and Transport Minister Henry.

The representatives of the directorates-general that are involved in this coordination body are referred to by interviewees as 'Sustainable Development Correspondents' (which resembles the structure that is put in place to coordinate budget issues within the Walloon administration). According to interviewees, the designation of those Correspondents could in the future evolve into the establishment of real 'sustainable development sections' in each directorate-general. That would be in accordance with one of the proposed actions of the Marshall Plan 2.Green, to instigate a process of developing sustainable development initiatives in each directorate-general (Wallonie, 2010: 49).

With this institutional instrument, the secretariat-general responds to the feeling that has reigned within the administration for years, i.e. that the lack of an institutional structure for sustainable development was an impediment towards real action.

2.4.1.3 Sustainable Development Plan and Opinion Unit: two future instruments?

The Sustainable Development Working Group is currently preparing a Sustainable Development Plan for the Walloon administration (Parlement wallon, 2011: 22, 27). While it has not been politically approved yet, informal contacts with leading officials demonstrate that the plan will encompass the sustainable development measures announced by the Marshall Plan 2.Green that are internal to the administration, such as a sustainable procurement policy and a commuter traffic policy. However, the plan will also include additional measures, e.g. targeting the consumption and infrastructure of the Walloon administration, in order to evolve into a more comprehensive administrative policy for sustainable development. A similar plan has been developed in 2009 by the French Community government (Communauté française de Belgique, 2009),²³ and Wallonia is inspired by its approach (Cour des comptes, 2010: 30; SPW 2011b: 165).

Another foreseen instrument is the Sustainable Development Opinion Unit, which will be charged with investigating the sustainability impact of certain governmental decisions. In con-

²² Wallonia's public administration was recently reformed. It is now composed of nine thematic directorates-general, and of the secretariat-general (headed by the secretary-general), which is responsible for the execution of transversal plans and strategies.

²³ The governments of Wallonia and the French Community are traditionally led by symmetrical coalitions. Since March 2008, Rudy Demotte is Prime Minister of both, which underscores the increasing cooperation between the two entities (and, by extension, between Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region, the two entities in which the French Community government exerts its Community competences). Since the last elections, four members of the Walloon government are also minister in the French Community government. For instance, Walloon Vice Prime Minister Nollet is also Research Minister in the Community government.

trast to the Sustainable Development Plan, it was not a spontaneous initiative by the administration, but was enshrined in the coalition agreement and in the Marshall Plan 2.Green (Parlement wallon, 2009: 29, 137; Wallonie, 2010: 49). The Green party promised such a 'sustainable development inspection' in its electoral programme (Écolo, 2009). Discussions on the creation of the opinion unit are ongoing since 2010, but Minister Nollet is confident of a positive outcome, as the budget for it is already agreed (Biélande, 2009; Parlement wallon, 2011: 29). Nollet attaches large importance to the unit, as it responds to the Greens' intention to assess political decision-making against its economic, societal and environmental impact, and will eventually evolve into the main catalyst of sustainable development in Wallonia's policies (Biélande, 2009; Cour des comptes, 2010: 44).

2.4.2 Legal instruments

Wallonia's sustainable development policy has no proper legal instruments. The 1994 Decree is, with its ecological interpretation, still the only legal reference for sustainable development. The lack of legal embeddedness pushed the Green members of parliament to propose a law in 2004 (and again in 2009) to revise the 1994 Decree and create a proper legal instrument for sustainable development (cf. *supra*).

In this context, it is pertinent to recall article 7bis of the Belgian Constitution, which obliges every Belgian government, including the Walloon government, to pursue sustainable development. Yet in contrast to the Flemish case (Happaerts, 2011b: 48), no concrete effect of that article has been found in Wallonia. However, the article is mentioned in the recent report by the Court of Audit as one of the legal obligations to develop a SDS in Wallonia (Cour des comptes, 2010: 12).

2.4.3 Economic instruments

2.4.3.1 Budget

A specific part of the budget reserved for the Marshall Plan 2.Green is assigned to the sustainable development policy. The Plan attaches a total of 5.25 million EUR to the measures taken in the transversal dynamic of sustainable development, in the fiscal years 2010 to 2014 (Wallonie, 2010: 48). At the time of writing, none of those financial means have yet been released (SPW 2011b: 160). In addition to that figure, it is important to point out that other measures which are presented by the government as part of its sustainable development policy, e.g. the 'employment-environment alliances' or the Walloon Institute for Sustainable Development, rely on different parts of the budget of the Marshall Plan. It can thus be said that, in comparison to previous political terms, the government's intentions to institutionalize sustainable development do not only rely on discursive commitment, but are now also supported by financial resources.

2.4.3.2 The government as a client and consumer?

In accordance with the exemplary role that the government wants to portray and its focus on good governance, the sustainable development policy emphasizes the role of the government as a client and a consumer. Most importantly, the Sustainable Development Plan that is being developed at the time of writing is centred on sustainable consumption by the government. Three measures foreseen by the Marshall Plan 2.Green are particularly worth mentioning in that regard: the inclusion of environmental, social and ethical clauses in public contracts, the development of a policy of sustainable procurement and environmental management, and the

development of an environmentally-friendly commuter traffic policy for employees of the Walloon administration (Wallonie, 2010: 48-49). The Sustainable Development Minister wants to assure that all measures taken by the government stimulate sustainable behaviour (Biélande, 2009). Since the government thus uses its role as client and consumer to influence the market, the future Sustainable Development Plan can be considered both as an institutional (planning) instrument, and as an economic instrument.

2.4.4 Information instruments

While no specific information instruments have yet been developed for the sustainable development policy, the public information campaign that was launched for the Marshall Plan 2.Green is considered here. The campaign included a television spot explaining the purpose of the Plan, in which it was said that the denomination '2.Green' symbolizes sustainable development (Nollet, 2011). With that spot, the government underscores its willingness to fully, and publicly, integrate sustainable development in its new strategy of economic recovery.

2.4.5 Voluntary approaches

Although no concrete voluntary approaches have yet been observed in the sustainable development policy, it is clear that the coalition is trying to include the private sector in its effort to integrate sustainable development into the economic recovery of Wallonia. That is precisely the assumption of the Marshall Plan 2.Green, which pours 1.62 billion EUR of public money (complemented by 1.15 billion EUR of private funding) into the economy. With measures such as the 'employment-environment alliances' or the intended call for projects on sustainable development (Wallonie, 2010: 15, 34), the private sector is financially encouraged to take sustainable development into account. The government's sustainable development policy is thus not exclusively focused on the public sector alone.

2.4.6 Concluding remarks

The analysis of policy instruments is not straightforward in the case of Wallonia, since the researcher is confronted with a very recent effort to institutionalize sustainable development - although attempts have been made since the mid-1990s - with no fixed set of instruments yet in place. Nevertheless, it is evident that the government prefers a mix of institutional, economic and voluntary instruments that rely on the view that sustainable development must be integrated in economic development, and in Wallonia's effort of economic recovery. That view reflects a lesson that the government has learned from previous failed attempts to institutionalize sustainable development via the first track of governance, i.e. with a SDS that was separated from the main political projects. Furthermore, the chosen set of instruments shows that the perceived weakness of lacking an institutional structure for sustainable development, is now overcome by a spontaneous initiative of the Walloon administration.

2.5 Explanatory factors

2.5.1 International factors

The Walloon government was very early in paying attention to sustainable development two years after Rio. The 1994 Decree and the PEDD reflect that Walloon policy-makers are familiar with the Brundtland Report and the outcome documents of Rio, by which they feel bound (cf. Gouvernement wallon, 1995: 8-9). Johannesburg, in contrast, had no resonance. In

any case, it is clear that international factors have never had a stringent effect. Although Wallonia feels bound by the Rio agenda, international stimuli have never been strong enough to compel policy-makers to the institutionalization of sustainable development, or to guarantee the government's backing when an initiative was actually taken. When sustainable development is finally institutionalized in 2009, it is without references to international policy-making.

With regard to transnational communication, a clear example of lesson-drawing was observed. When the Walloon administration decided to develop a sustainable development plan with internal administrative measures, it was inspired by a similar plan recently developed by the government of the French Community in Belgium. Furthermore, the law that was proposed by the Greens in 2004 and 2009 was partly modelled after the sustainable development policy of the federal government. Wallonia thus shops primarily within Belgium for sources of lesson-drawing for sustainable development.

While international legitimacy pressures never had a stringent effect in Wallonia, it is clear that influences from the national level in Belgium were more important. The (failed) effort to develop a WSDS in 2006 was directly triggered by the intra-Belgian negotiations on a national SDS. The recent report by the Court of Audit could possibly have a similar effect. Since the pressures coming from those national institutions are *sensu stricto* 'external' to the Walloon government, it is pertinent to analyze them under this explanatory factor. However - beside the fact that it feels unnatural to treat national influences as an 'international' factor - anything that has to do with the national context is also intimately related to the degree of autonomy of a subnational government. Therefore, the national influences that have arisen in the analysis of this case point towards an overlap of two of the explanatory factors, which has to be dealt with later in this dissertation.

2.5.2 Degree of autonomy

The explanatory value of the degree of autonomy of Wallonia has not significantly been manifested. Nevertheless, the fact that Wallonia has a relatively high degree of self-rule (13/15, see Table 2), with a broad range of important competences, did support the conviction in Wallonia - especially fostered by the Green party - that the government, as a public actor, has many opportunities to stimulate sustainable development. Those opportunities can be applied in the government's procurement policy, in the way it distributes financial resources for research, in energy measures, etc. The conviction is most recently expressed in the government's strategic goal to become a role model with regard to good governance, which is led by the Sustainable Development Minister in his capacity as Minister of Public Administration.

Table 2 Degree of self-rule of Wallonia (data from Hooghe et al., 2008b)

Components	Score
Institutional depth (0-3)	3
Policy scope (0-4)	3
Fiscal autonomy (0-4)	3
Representation (0-4)	4
Total (0-15)	13

Although Wallonia has a relatively wide policy scope (3/4), it needs to be emphasized that it does not dispose of an important share of the competences allocated to the subnational level in Belgium, i.e. the Community competences. Indeed, while a single Flemish government simultaneously controls the Regional and Community competences (cf. 4.2), such a merge did not

happen south of the language border, where the Walloon and French Community governments co-exist side by side.²⁴ Community competences include issues of education, culture, health and social assistance (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 185-186; Swenden et al., 2006: 866). That explains why the Walloon sustainable development policy focuses little on the social dimension of sustainable development. However, the analysis also touched upon the increasing cooperation between Wallonia and the French Community (cf. footnote 23). That cooperation happens, for instance, with regard to the Marshall Plan 2.Green and sustainable development. As a result, and in an increasingly complex political context in Belgium, it is possible that the lines between the Region and the Community will blur south of the language border too.

2.5.3 Political context

In the analysis of party political dynamics, it is clear that the most significant initiatives for sustainable development have been taken by the Green party. At their first taste of power in 1999, the Greens pleaded for the inclusion of sustainable development in the coalition agreement and the Future Contract. However, as they were not numerically necessary in the majority, their bargaining power appeared too weak to force the Socialists and Liberals to live up to their promises. The other coalition partners refused a transversal initiative for sustainable development, saying that the Future Contract already constituted one. When the subsequent government of Socialists and Christian Democrats tried to institutionalize sustainable development, the initiative stumbled across a manifest lack of political will. There was in general no political support to lift sustainable development beyond its environmental frame, and some stakeholders even opposed against it. The failure to reconcile political differences in favour of sustainable development appeared to be overcome when a phenomenal electoral victory for the Green party resulted in the institutionalization of sustainable development. Retaining enormous bargaining power, the Greens made sustainable development the number one strategic goal of the government. They also managed to materialize many of their political preferences in the sustainable development policy, such as the important focus on the public sphere. The fact that the Green party was confronted with much less resistance by their coalition partners in 2009, in comparison with 1999, is a symptom of a broad political backing and a favourable atmosphere for sustainable development. The difference between 1999 and 2009 suggests that the political context is a major decisive factor in the Walloon case.

Instances of identity politics have not been found in Wallonia, but it is revealing that the current sustainable development policy is associated with the ambition to strengthen the Walloon identity.

2.5.4 Socioeconomic conditions

The south of Belgium has been in need of an economic stimulus since the 1960s (cf. *supra*). That means that Wallonia, ever since it became a political entity after the federalization of Belgium, has systematically put its economic recovery on top of its priority list. As a consequence, when the concept of sustainable development emerged on the political agenda, it never

²⁴ Moreover, the territories and populations controlled by the Walloon government and the French Community government are very different (which is less so for Flanders). The Walloon government exercises Regional competences over about 3.5 million inhabitants in Wallonia, which encompasses the population of the German-speaking Community. The French Community government exercises Community competences over about 4.2 million inhabitants in both Brussels and Wallonia (but excluding the German-speaking Community).

found the priority position, nor the political capital, that it needed to be institutionalized. Wallonia thus confirms the assumption made by Lafferty and Meadowcroft (2000: 423) that OECD governments that face significant economic challenges can count on less resources and less commitment to invest in sustainable development.

When the Green party managed to institutionalize sustainable development in 2009, it did so by coupling sustainable development with the revival of the Walloon economy, under the conceptual umbrella of the 'green economy'. The electoral victory of the Greens and a positive political atmosphere towards environmental issues made way for the reconciliation of environment and economy, which had appeared impossible in the past. Because of the Marshall Plan 2.Green, the institutionalization of sustainable development can now draw from the budget, and the political capital, that is put aside for Wallonia's economic recovery.

3. The sustainable development policy of North Rhine-Westphalia

3.1 Institutionalization of sustainable development

3.1.1 The resonance of Rio

In Germany, the publication of the Brundtland Report did not stir up many concrete initiatives (Jänicke et al., 2001: 7). It was not until after the Rio Summit that sustainable development arose on the German political agenda. That happened not at the federal level, since the federal government—although it has been labelled a pioneer in environmental policy-making before—lagged behind with regard to sustainable development in the 1990s, but rather at the subnational and local levels (Jänicke et al., 2001: 19; Tils, 2007: 164). Among the *Länder*, the front-runner was Bavaria. As a reaction to Rio, the Bavarian Christian Democrat government signed an environmental pact (*Umweltpakt*) with the business sector in 1995 (Kern, 2008: 135). Renewed in 2000, the environmental pact has become an exemplary form of cooperation between government and the private sector (Jørgensen, 2007: 149; 2012). It aimed simultaneously at stronger environmental protection and at strengthening the competitiveness of Bavaria's companies, but also at deregulation (Jørgensen, 2002: 21). It had a strong focus on certifications of the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS, cf. infra) (Kern, 2008: 136), but also included goals that exceeded EMAS's scope, including on climate change and energy (Jørgensen, 2002: 21-22). The environmental pact resulted in a sustainable development action programme for Bavaria, developed shortly before the Johannesburg Summit (Kern, 2008: 136).

While Bavaria thus assumed a clear front-runner position, the Rio Summit also produced initiatives in North Rhine-Westphalia. Initially, action was most obvious at the local level. More so than in other *Länder*, Rio encouraged many North Rhine-Westphalian municipalities to issue a Local Agenda 21 (Kern et al., 2007: 609-610). Because of that success, a horizontal 'Agenda Transfer' agency was set up in 1996 to support all local initiatives in the *Land* (Kern et al., 2007: 616). The independent agency received financial support from the North Rhine-Westphalian government. Since 1995, North Rhine-Westphalia was ruled by a red-green coalition (see Table 3), which followed a 15-year period of absolute majority rule by the Socialist party (SPD, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*). Besides financing the Agenda Transfer agency, the government also funded Local Agenda 21 activities directly, and offered financial support to municipalities which engaged in North-South cooperation (Kern et al., 2007: 614).

Table 3 Governments in North Rhine-Westphalia since 1995

Political term	Coalition	Prime Minister	Environment Minister
1995-2000	SPD-Grüne	Johannes Rau (SPD) as of 1998: Wolfgang Clement (SPD)	Bärbel Höhn (Grüne)
2000-2005	SPD-Grüne	Wolfgang Clement (SPD) as of 2002: Peer Steinbrück (SPD)	Bärbel Höhn (Grüne)
2005-2010	CDU-FDP	Jürgen Rüttgers (CDU)	Eckhard Uhlenberg (CDU)
Since 2010	SPD-Grüne	Hannelore Kraft (SPD)	Johannes Remmel (Grüne)

Although the red-green coalition gave significant support to local sustainable development initiatives, it did not initiate a *Land*-wide programme at the time. According to interviewees, the Green party (Grüne) - members of which were present in Rio as part of a parliamentary delegation - wanted to implement the Rio agenda in North Rhine-Westphalia, but failed to convince the SPD to include such a project in the 1995 coalition agreement.

Nevertheless, sustainable development came on the agenda during the 1995-2000 term. It was the Christian Democratic CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*) - the only opposition party represented in parliament during that term - that got the ball rolling, by proposing a parliamentary debate about a 'Bavarian' environmental pact in North Rhine-Westphalia (Landtag NRW, 1997a). The red-green majority dismissed the idea, but the issue had become impossible for the government to ignore. In 1998, Prime Minister Clement announced the government's intention to launch "an initiative for the Agenda 21, for an environmental pact North Rhine-Westphalia" (Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7354, own translation). He also announced that Environment Minister Höhn and himself would invite a broad range of stakeholders to develop such a pact (Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7354). In reaction to the Prime Minister's declaration, the Socialist and Green fractions in parliament deposited a formal demand a few weeks later, asking the government to establish "an Agenda 21 NRW as strategy for sustainable development and as framework for voluntary, binding and verifiable agreements" (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 3, own translation). The proposal was then discussed in several parliamentary committees (e.g. Environment, Economy, Europe). In the debates, the Green representatives in particular showed their support for a *Land*-wide Agenda 21 process (e.g. Landtag NRW, 1998b; d). However, the coalition did not put its words into action, while the opposition kept pushing for an initiative (Landtag NRW, 1999). Unable to avoid the question any longer, Environment Minister Höhn replied in the fall of 1999 that the development of a SDS needs time, and she made clear that the current coalition would be unable to present concrete results during the final months of its term (Höhn, 1999). She did announce that a 'pilot phase' would be undertaken before 2000. During that time, several societal groups were contacted on their possible interest in and views on a *Land*-wide Agenda process.

As the first term of the red-green coalition was nearing its end, disputes between the SPD and the Greens on high-profile political issues (e.g. energy and transport) intensified. The renewal of the coalition was far from guaranteed when elections were held in May 2000. Both the SPD and the Greens lost seats - especially to the Liberal party (FDP, *Freie Demokratische Partei*) who came back in parliament as the third party before the Greens - but they still retained a majority. The second red-green coalition agreement that followed, constituted the first step in the institutionalization of the sustainable development policy.

3.1.2 Progressive institutionalization from 2000 onwards

As the Greens had lost more seats than the SPD, the power relations within the coalition changed. Green Minister Höhn had to hand over the important Spatial Planning portfolio to the Socialists, and her budgets were reduced. In exchange, she was given the (very small) Development Cooperation portfolio, which was previously controlled by the Prime Minister. However, the Greens convinced their coalition partner to include a North Rhine-Westphalian answer to Rio in the coalition agreement, and thus achieved what they failed to do in 1995 (SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 21). The Greens felt backed by the past parliamentary debates to push the issue through, and they realized that, in order for the SPD's support to be guaranteed, they needed the promise to be formally embedded in the coalition agreement. The document attributed the responsibility of the process to the Environment Ministry, and announced the establishment of a 'green cabinet' to coordinate the process (SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 22). The coalition agreement thus gave the starting shot of the institutionalization of a North Rhine-Westphalian sustainable development policy.

A few months after the installation of the new government, the Socialist and Green fractions in parliament again made a formal request to the government to develop what would be called the Agenda 21 NRW. It was conceived as a large-scale consultation process, intended to result in legislative proposals in 2003 in order to take further steps to implement the commitments (Landtag NRW, 2000a). The coalition agreed on the themes and the organization of the process. It established the 'green cabinet', as well as the Future Council, a multistakeholder body asked to guide the process. Subsequently, several events were held to launch the Agenda 21 NRW. The government then supported a series of projects. The process ended towards the end of the political term, with recommendations meant for a subsequent SDS (cf. *infra*).

3.1.3 Sustainable development post-2005

The elections of May 2005 constituted a complete turnover in North Rhine-Westphalian politics. The CDU left the SPD far behind in the results, while both the Green party and the FDP ended just above the 5% threshold. The Christian Democrats left the opposition after 39 years, and formed a 'black-yellow' coalition with the Liberals (see Table 3). The political turnover had many consequences for governmental policies, and the Agenda 21 NRW was no exception. The CDU had always led the opposition against the project, as soon as it had become clear that the red-green coalition would not copy Bavaria's environmental pact. Ignoring the former coalition's goal to preserve and to further develop the institutional structure of Agenda 21 NRW (MUNLV 2005: 12), all processes, projects and instruments associated with it were abolished. What is more, is that sustainable development as a concept was abandoned as well. The reason for it is that, as most interviewees confirm, the Agenda 21 NRW had been identified completely as a 'Green' project, which ultimately became the major obstacle for its continuity.

After 2005, the black-yellow coalition focused its work related to sustainable development on the relation between business and environmental policy. The government established the Dialogue Economy and Environment (*Dialog Wirtschaft und Umwelt*), a 'Bavaria-like' mechanism for institutionalized coordination between the industry and the government, led by the Environment and Economy Ministries (MUNLV 2009b). But the government also pursued some specific themes (which had been important in the red-green sustainable development policy too), for instance through the newly established *Allianz für die Fläche*, an alliance bringing together the government, local authorities and a number of stakeholders, with regard to the reduction of land use (MUNLV 2009a). The black-yellow coalition thus focused on enhanced cooperation between government and other stakeholders on selected policy issues, while

leaving the overarching idea of sustainable development aside. Only some small initiatives were taken, for instance in education for sustainable development. Interviews with administrative officials and NGOs confirm that between 2005 and 2010, the government had no comprehensive sustainable development policy.

Addendum: North Rhine-Westphalia after 2010

In May 2010, the North Rhine-Westphalian elections resulted in a very complex political situation, with the CDU and the SPD having an equal amount of seats, and introducing the left-wing The Left (*Die Linke*) as the fifth party in parliament. After several thorny rounds of negotiations, a red-green coalition was once again established (see Table 3), but this time it is a minority government (controlling 90 of 181 seats). Until the time of writing, no new initiatives for an overarching sustainable development policy have been taken. Instead, the Green Environment Minister invests much political capital in climate change, which is now an official part of his portfolio.

In the remainder of this analysis, the focus is on the sustainable development policy conducted before 2005, concretized in the Agenda 21 NRW. That is the only policy package that was ever institutionalized and that can be considered as a sustainable development policy according to the criteria defined in the analytical framework. Developments after 2005 are only mentioned where and if useful.

3.2 Policy framing

3.2.1 Environmental Pact or Agenda 21?

Sustainable development appeared in North Rhine-Westphalia's policy discourse since 1990. References to it, however, were initially indirect and without mentioning the concept itself.²⁵ For instance, in the following quote from the Socialist government's 1990 opening address, the allusion to the Brundtland Report and to the three pillars is striking:

"If we want to bring about a common future for all, we must continue on the path of renewal, bring about social peace through social justice, take ecological responsibility seriously and conserve and strengthen economic capacity" (Landtag NRW, 1990: 146, own translation and emphasis).

As of 1995, however, the term 'sustainability' was omnipresent. In the red-green coalition's opening address, both in 1995 and in 2000, it was a recurring theme. That is assumingly due to the Green party, which was in power for the first time and wanted to implement the Rio agenda. The red-green coalition recalled the Brundtland Commission and interpreted its message as 'sustainable economy'. It stated that the concept acknowledges that something that is not ecologically responsible, cannot be economically viable in the long run (Landtag NRW, 1995: 139).

That specific framing of sustainable development, joining environment and economy, frequently re-emerged in the policy discourse. The trend was reinforced by the fact that the debate on a concrete sustainable development initiative in North Rhine-Westphalia found its

²⁵ That could be due to the fact that there is no official translation of 'sustainable development' in German (Beuermann, 2000: 90). Still today, both the terms '*Nachhaltige Entwicklung*' / '*Nachhaltigkeit*' and '*Zukunftsfähige Entwicklung*' / '*Zukunftsfähigkeit*' are used throughout Germany.

genesis in the CDU's call for an environmental pact in 1997. In the debate on such a pact, the CDU opposition and the Greens were diametrically opposed, also with regard to the framing of sustainable development. The Christian Democrats vigorously avoided the term 'sustainable', although they indirectly referred to the concept and to the three pillars. They interpreted the challenge narrowly as the marriage of environmental and economic concerns. More specifically, they emphasized the link between environmental protection and the role of companies. In doing so, they continuously referred to Bavaria's Christian Democratic government, whose environmental pact was precisely focused on that link (Landtag NRW, 1997a; 1998a). The Greens have always dismissed an environmental pact. They presented sustainable development, a term that they enthusiastically apply, as a much broader challenge than reconciling environment and economy. That is why they preferred the language of Agenda 21, which they considered to be much more appropriate and innovative than an environmental pact. They viewed the publication of Rio's Agenda 21 as a legitimization of their conviction that environmental challenges need to permeate all societal challenges, and they emphasized their positive experiences with Local Agenda 21 in North Rhine-Westphalia (Landtag NRW, 1997b; 1998a). The SPD's position in the conceptual debate was always rather unclear, as they kept a lower profile than the Greens and the CDU. At the outset, the SPD used the terms 'Agenda 21' and 'environmental pact' interchangeably. Only when the Agenda 21 NRW was institutionalized, they abandoned the language of an environmental pact. While Prime Minister Clement in 1998 announced "an initiative for the Agenda 21, for an environmental pact North Rhine-Westphalia" (cf. *supra*), in later texts the initiative is presented as "an Agenda 21 as strategy for sustainable development" (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 3; 2002: 7396).

The debate on an environmental pact launched by the CDU in 1997 was held in the context of the implementation of EMAS. Developed by the European Commission, EMAS is a label attributed to companies that evaluate and improve their environmental performance. Intended to promote corporate social responsibility, it was launched in 1995 and was originally open to industrial sectors only. In Germany, the government is traditionally proactive in facilitating the adoption of such certifications by its companies. In several German *Länder*, the introduction of EMAS triggered agreements between the government and business associations (Jänicke et al., 2001: 18-19). While promoting industries to comply with EMAS and thus contribute to environmental goals, the government in turn helped companies to adopt EU rules at low transaction costs, and more generally attempted to reduce bureaucratic burdens and governmental oversight (Jørgensen, 2012). With its environmental pact, Bavaria was the first to react to EMAS. In North Rhine-Westphalia, the debate on a sustainable development initiative in the context of EMAS uncovered an ideological battle which again opposed Christian Democrats and Greens. In its support for an environmental pact, the CDU continuously emphasized the need for a cutback of bureaucracy in environmental policy, and for voluntary agreements with the business sector (Landtag NRW, 1997a; 2000a). The Greens, in contrast, stressed that voluntary agreements are never an absolute solution, and that government-imposed obligations are always a part of the answer (Landtag NRW, 1997b; 1998a). They reproached the CDU to be after a reduction of environmental standards and to raise all restrictions on companies. In this debate, the Socialists distanced themselves from their coalition partner, saying that not all can be ordained and that sustainable development needs to be made attractive for the business sector too (Landtag NRW, 1998a). The result was a compromise which stated that Agenda 21 NRW is a framework for "voluntary, binding and verifiable agreements" (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 3, own translation) and that it must make environmental policy more productive and less bureaucratic (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 1).

3.2.2 The environment, the economy, and jobs

In mentions of sustainable development, references to the three pillars are frequent, but they are seldom quite explicit and they never constitute the core of the policy framing in North Rhine-Westphalia. An example is the definition of sustainable development included in the government's end report:

“Sustainability is aimed at the protection and the lasting security of the natural conditions of existence and it pursues the principle of equity for currently living and for future generations. It is always based on a levelling of economic, ecological and social interests in a democratic order and it offers all societal groups the opportunity to cooperate” (MUNLV 2005: 1, own translation).

What is eye-catching, however, is that the social pillar of sustainable development is very frequently interpreted as employment. That is reflected, for instance, in the subtitle that was given to Agenda 21 NRW by the parliamentary fractions of SPD and the Green party: ‘alliance for environment, innovation and employment’ (Landtag NRW, 1998c). The concretization of sustainable development was also referred to as “sustainable and competitive jobs in an environmentally friendly economy” (Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7354, own translation). Especially in the discourses of the Socialist ministers and representatives, the primary association made with sustainable development is ‘employment and environment’, a theme that was already on the SPD’s programme before 1995. The SPD literally defines ‘sustainability’ as “employment and environment through sustainable economy” (Landtag NRW, 1997b: 5276, own translation). Jobs are the leitmotiv and benchmark of the SPD (Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7350). As a consequence, the emphasis on jobs remained an integral part of the policy framing of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia.

3.2.3 Structural change and (inter)national competition

The policy framing of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia is linked to two other issues, i.e. the structural change of the economy and the competition with other entities. North Rhine-Westphalia is traditionally an important industrial centre in Germany, especially due to the historical presence of coal in the Ruhr region. Similar to what happened in many industrial centres in Europe, North Rhine-Westphalia has been going through an evolution since the 1960s, from an essentially industrial to a predominantly high technology and service-based economy. In German, that process is referred to as ‘*Strukturwandel*’ (‘structural change’). As the debate on sustainable development arose with that process still going on, it was logically framed in its context. In his first opening address, Prime Minister Clement introduces ‘sustainability’ as “the only way that promises success in a highly developed industrial service economy” (Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7350, own translation). When the coalition agreement in 2000 institutionalized sustainable development, it did so under the title ‘environment: sustainability and ecological *Strukturwandel* in NRW’ (SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 29). In the context of that structural change, sustainable development is often interpreted as the efficient management of natural resources, and as an opportunity for innovation and jobs (Landtag NRW, 1995: 139; 1998e: 7350; 2000c: 187; SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 21). Moreover, in that context the key characteristics of North Rhine-Westphalia’s economy are frequently emphasized. For instance, it is said that services are already the major sector, but that North Rhine-Westphalia remains an important industrial entity, and one in which agriculture retains a key position (Landesregierung NRW, 2003: 27; Landtag NRW, 1998e: 7350; 2000c: 175). Most significantly, it is underlined that North Rhine-Westphalia is Germany’s number one *Energiewelt* (especially

because of its pit coal and brown coal) and that it wants to hold on to that position (Landesregierung NRW, 2003: 10, 19; Landtag NRW, 2000c: 177).

North Rhine-Westphalia's (economic) competition with other entities, too, is linked to the policy framing of sustainable development. That competition is situated at three levels. First, North Rhine-Westphalia is benchmarked with regard to the other German *Länder*. The most important competitor is Bavaria, the second most populous *Land* but with a higher GDP/capita than North Rhine-Westphalia, and often considered as a front-runner (cf. supra). Green Minister Höhn therefore argued that North Rhine-Westphalia needed an Agenda 21 in order to redeem the 'number one position' in Germany (Landtag NRW, 1998a: 8015). At the second level, the North Rhine-Westphalian government enters in competition with the German federal government. The effect of the political asymmetry²⁶ is manifest: in the initial debates, the red-green coalition partners invoked the absence of leadership in Berlin with regard to sustainable development as a motivation to act in Düsseldorf. In doing so, federal Environment Minister Angela Merkel of the black-yellow coalition was their main target (Landtag NRW, 1998a). After October 1998, when the first red-green coalition was installed at the federal level, the government's references to the federal government became much less aggressive and more cooperative. Finally, a third level of competition opposes North Rhine-Westphalia to other European subnational entities. North Rhine-Westphalia had the intention to become a 'top region' in the EU, and labelled sustainable development as the measuring criterion for it (Landesregierung NRW, 2003: 25; Landtag NRW, 1998a; SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 6-7).

3.2.4 Participation and equity as Green accents in sustainable development

Besides the three pillars, the link between environment and economy, and the association between environment and jobs, the policy framing of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia contains two other important elements. Those are North-South equity on the one hand, and participation on the other hand, and they are both especially emphasized by the Green party.

From the outset, the North-South dimension was one of the major elements of the Green's interpretation of UNCED. They stated that Northern societies need to adapt their modes of production and consumption in order for development to be sustainable (Landtag NRW, 2000b: 11791). As a consequence, they advanced North-South equity as an essential foundation of the Agenda 21 project (Höhn, 1999: 2). Before Agenda 21 NRW was institutionalized, they already invested in increased attention for North-South equity in the Local Agenda 21s, e.g. through financial support (Landtag NRW, 1998a: 8015). The Greens also introduced the language of Agenda 21 in North Rhine-Westphalia's existing development cooperation policy (Landtag NRW, 2000b). In their fervent application of the concept of Agenda 21, and in accordance with the spirit of Brundtland and Rio, they thus created an unbreakable link between two of their most cherished policy areas, i.e. environment and development cooperation. Subsequently, with the red-green coalition's renewal in 2000, the Greens were able to materialize that link, when Environment Minister Höhn received the Development Cooperation portfolio. A conference on development cooperation in North Rhine-Westphalia at the end of 2000 then became an important step in the launch of Agenda 21 NRW. This particular aspect of the policy framing of sustainable development is illustrated by the Environment Ministry's end report

²⁶ *Political asymmetry* refers to the situation where a federal and a subnational government are ruled by different political parties, placing certain parties in power at one level and in opposition at the other level.

of Agenda 21 NRW. In the part that frames the genesis of North Rhine-Westphalia's sustainable development policy, instead of mentioning the Brundtland Report, more attention is given to another world commission, i.e. the one on international development issues, which was headed by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1980 (MUNLV 2005: 1).

Participation is another key element of the Greens' framing of sustainable development in general and of Agenda 21 in particular. From the outset, they stressed their preference for a broad participatory approach (Landtag NRW, 1998a). As Agenda 21 NRW began to take shape, the participatory approach received more emphasis, describing the initiative as a 'discussion process' (Landtag NRW, 2000a). Of particular importance is that the Green party always advanced a very broad approach to participation, to distance themselves from the CDU's preference to focus on companies only. In the Greens' view, the participation should be extended to environmental groups, labour unions, consumer organizations, North-South groups, women, religious organizations, schools, etc. (Landtag NRW, 1998a; 2002: 7396).

3.2.5 The global and local legitimization of Agenda 21 NRW

It is clear that in the development of a sustainable development policy, the debate on an environmental pact played a key triggering role. Furthermore, the government regularly invoked two other motivations for their Agenda 21 NRW. On the one hand, it often referred to governance processes at higher levels, mostly to Rio and its call for national SDSs or 'environmental plans'. In its references to Rio, it is clear that North Rhine-Westphalia did not feel directly addressed by UNCED, but that it considered Agenda 21 as a role model (SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 21). If anything, the government felt a normative obligation to take an initiative for sustainable development, a feeling which was enhanced by the failure of the Christian Democrat and Liberal government at the federal level to do so (Landesregierung NRW, 2002: 6; Landtag NRW, 1998a). On the other hand, Agenda 21 NRW was regularly framed by the government as the natural consequence of the bottom-up initiatives that had already sprouted in North Rhine-Westphalia. Especially before 2000, the red-green coalition partners were quick to stress that many sustainable development initiatives were already going on in the *Land*, especially at the local level (Landtag NRW, 1997b). If there is a dynamic flowing 'from Rio to North Rhine-Westphalia', it passed through local initiatives first. The popularity of Local Agenda 21 in North Rhine-Westphalia thus formed the legitimization for a *Land*-wide initiative.

3.2.6 Governance model

In the North Rhine-Westphalian case, it is hard to establish the governance model of the sustainable development policy. That is because before and during the Agenda 21 process, it was rather unclear how it would be structured and governed. Nevertheless, characteristics of two governance models can be observed. On the one hand, the preference for a holistic governance model is distinguished. Both coalition partners state that sustainable development exceeds the scope of environmental issues, and that the concept needs to be approached in an overarching and integrative way (Landtag NRW, 1998a). Their frequent allusions to the three pillars reveal a consciousness of the international discourse, but the indirect character of those references illustrate that they do not blindly repeat that discourse. Another typical characteristic of the holistic governance model is the strong emphasis on participation, especially since in this case the participation is interpreted in a very broad sense. The Greens, in particular, consider the sustainable development policy to include the three dimensions of sustainable development, the concern for employment and North-South equity, all in a participative approach (Landtag NRW, 1998b). They wanted sustainable development to be a transversal task for all

policy sectors (Höhn, 2001b: 4). A final feature pointing to the preference for the holistic governance model is the statement by Environment Minister Höhn that all policy sectors will be tested against the requirements of sustainable development (Höhn, 1999). That claim, however, was never put into practice.

On the other hand, the sustainable development policy to a large extent relied on an ecological interpretation of sustainable development. Although a consensus existed that sustainable development touches upon all policy sectors, it soon became clear that the government's first area of intervention would be its environmental policy (Landtag NRW, 1998a). That is also why the Greens, in a reaction to the CDU's comment that Bavaria's sustainable development policy is led by the Prime Minister, emphasized that it is more common that the Environment minister takes the lead in sustainable development processes (Landtag NRW, 1998a). The Greens also underlined that sustainable development requires trade-offs between the three dimensions (Landtag NRW, 1997b). The ecological interpretation of sustainable development is manifest since the first mentions of the concept, and in the early ambition to make North Rhine-Westphalia the 'greenest' industrial entity of Europe (Landtag NRW, 1990: 153). For the red-green coalition, the sustainable development policy marks a new chapter in North Rhine-Westphalia's environmental policy, which will be significantly improved in the process (Landtag NRW, 1998a; SPD and Die Grünen, 2000: 22).

3.2.7 Concluding remarks

The analysis of North Rhine-Westphalia's policy framing illustrates how the Agenda 21 project materialized within parliamentary debates. As a consequence, those debates shaped the framing of sustainable development. As the major choices regarding policy framing were made between 1995 and 2000, the three main political parties played a role (with the FDP not being represented in parliament during that term). Therefore, the ideological preferences of the SPD, the CDU and the Green party had an impact. Experiencing their first share of executive power, the Greens increasingly tried to control the debate, which culminated in the recognition of the Environment Minister's leadership over the Agenda 21 NRW as from 2000. Because of the activeness of the Greens, the policy framing of sustainable development bears an unmistakable green mark. That is illustrated by the emphasis on the participatory approach of the Agenda 21 NRW. However, that emphasis also revealed that, as from 2000, the process dimension of the project overtook the substantive aspects of sustainable development in the policy debate.

The debate on the policy framing of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia uncovers a diffuse understanding of the concept and even a lack of consensus about the term itself. At the same time, the fact that the framing took shape through strong political debates resulted in compromise formulations. At the end of the day, the interpretation of the Brundtland Report is reflected, with a concern for reconciling economic and environmental challenges. That reconciliation is sometimes narrowly interpreted as the contribution of companies to environmental protection, stimulated by the launch of EMAS. Yet more importantly, it is complemented by a third, social, pillar of sustainable development, in accordance with Rio and the IUCN. That social dimension is on the one hand often focused on job creation, especially within the context of the discourse on structural change and economic competition. On the other hand, under the influence of the Greens, it is interpreted as the inclusion of a North-South dimension.

3.3 Policy goals

In the analysis of policy goals in the North Rhine-Westphalian case, the researcher is confronted with a two-level effort of goal-setting. On the one hand, there are the goals attached to the Agenda 21 NRW itself. In theory, those are the goals that form the unit of analysis according to the analytical framework. However, as the Agenda 21 NRW was gradually interpreted as a participatory process meant to produce goals itself (cf. *infra*), the goals *of* the Agenda 21 NRW are rather vague and hardly substantive. On the other hand, there are the policy goals that were produced *by* the Agenda 21 NRW. Those goals are more substantive and reflect more appropriately the goals of a future North Rhine-Westphalian sustainable development policy. However, as the discussion on backing shows (cf. *infra*), those goals were never truly approved or formally supported by the government, and they cannot be considered as dimensions of the government's sustainable development policy. In this section, the analysis is thus centred on the first type of goals, while the second type is mentioned for information only.

3.3.1 Strategic policy goals

As the Agenda 21 NRW was eventually conceived as a rather short-term, well-delineated project, few strategic policy goals were ever formally defined. In the most abstract terms, it was aimed at making sustainable development a 'shaping force' in North Rhine-Westphalia (Landesregierung NRW, 2004b: 2; MUNLV 2005: 12) and at anchoring the thinking in terms of sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalian society (Landesregierung NRW, 2002: 10).

As for the goals produced *by* the Agenda 21 process, the work of the Future Council (cf. *infra*) comes closest to developing strategic policy goals. In its end report, the Future Council draws an image of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2015, thereby depicting its 'ideal' development (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a). The strategic goals thus presented refer to North Rhine-Westphalia's economic development, the taxation system, research and education policy, public service, demographic policy and immigration, nature, sports and culture. The goals developed by the Future Council are independent from the themes or general framing of the Agenda 21 NRW (cf. *infra*). Moreover, they pay no attention to the distribution of competences between North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany and the EU (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a: 7). For instance, the goals regarding taxation actually concern national powers above all.

3.3.2 Operational policy goals

The Agenda 21 NRW was designed to reach the main strategic goal of the sustainable development policy, i.e. to make sustainable development a reality in North Rhine-Westphalia. While that single strategic goal remained constant, the more concrete, operational goals underwent a remarkable evolution. At the outset, the operational goals reflected two main aims. On the one hand, the Agenda 21 NRW needed to improve North Rhine-Westphalia's environmental policy. More concretely, it needed to endow it with better objectives, to make it less bureaucratic and to orient it towards job creation (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 1). On the other hand, the Agenda 21 NRW was a step towards establishing voluntary yet binding agreements with the business sector on environmental issues (Landtag NRW, 1998c: 1). The latter goal, with its focus on voluntary agreements, was a consequence of the fact that the policy framing was influenced by the debate on a possible environmental pact. While the focus on environmental policy and on the conclusion of agreements remained constant before 2000 (e.g. Höhn,

1999), a change occurred afterwards. When the coalition started its second term in 2000, the operational goals of the Agenda 21 NRW were stated differently. The new operational goals applied another interpretation of the term 'agreement': "Between the partners of the Agenda 21 NRW common goals, concrete steps towards implementation, the respective contributions of the Partners to that end and the required instruments will be *agreed*" (Landtag NRW, 2000a: 1, own translation and emphasis). The Agenda 21 NRW was thus conceived as a process which had as its main goal to 'agree' on goals and instruments for North Rhine-Westphalia's sustainable development policy. As the interpretation of 'agreement' was thus spun into another meaning by the red-green coalition, the original goal of concluding voluntary yet binding agreements disappeared into the background. Voluntary agreements were not further mentioned, and the Agenda 21 NRW was completely refurbished as a participatory process in search of a 'real' sustainable development policy.

As soon as the process was running, four operational goals were defined as follows: a stronger embedding of the idea of sustainable development in society, a contribution of North Rhine-Westphalian public policy towards sustainable development, the mobilization of stakeholders, and concrete changes towards sustainable development through projects (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2003: 17). Those final operational goals reflect the strategic policy goal. They also indicate that after 2000 the process was fully oriented towards the realization of a set of concrete projects.

As for the second type of operational goals, the policy goals developed *by* the Agenda 21 NRW, those are found in the so-called 'mission statements, objectives and indicators' developed by the core working groups (Landesregierung NRW, 2003). Within the six themes of the Agenda 21 NRW, the working groups developed a broad range of goals that were meant as recommendations for a subsequent SDS (cf. *infra*). Yet those goals were never formally approved by the government.

3.3.3 Goal characteristics

3.3.3.1 Thematic areas of the goals

When Minister Höhn presented the government's ideas for the policy in 1998, the focus was on environmental issues and on the North-South dimension. She said that the priority areas were: the protection of the atmosphere and nature, responsible resource management, the protection of human health, environmentally friendly transport, a sustainable environmental conscience, and North-South equity (Landtag NRW, 1998a: 8016). In 2001, the government formally agreed on the following six themes for the Agenda 21 NRW: climate change and sustainable mobility, sustainable economy, human settlement and natural spaces (land use), consumer protection and health, global responsibility (North-South equity), and sustainable social and women's policy (later simply referred to as 'social policy'). In addition, three transversal issues were defined: administration, education and migration (i.e. the integration of citizens of foreign descent) (Höhn, 2001a; MUNLV 2005: 5). The official themes show a slightly minor focus on environmental issues, and the inclusion of economic and especially social issues (sustainable social policy, migration, education). It reflects a compromise between the Greens and the Socialist party, while the inclusion of the 'sustainable economy' theme is impacted by the debate on an environmental pact and on EMAS. Nevertheless, the selected themes were all more or less covered by UNCED and/or the EUSDS, although no reference is made to them. The third theme focusing on land use, however, is a typical German issue. The rapid occupation of open spaces is a concern that, after the example of the Agenda 21 NRW, was also

introduced as a goal in the national SDS, i.e. reducing the daily occupation of new terrain from 130 to 30 hectares by 2020 (Bundesregierung, 2002: 99). In short, the themes reflect a broad approach to sustainable development, which is in line with the policy framing. The government's end report suggests that, for the development of a future sustainable development policy, climate change and mobility would be considered as two separate themes, and education, culture and sports would be added as an extra theme (MUNLV 2005: 5). While education was already included as a transversal issue before, the inclusion of culture and sports is a clear reference to the work of the Future Council. As the Future Council also included a famous soccer coach and several members from the cultural and media sector, it always paid attention to those topics (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a). As mentioned above, the themes focused on by the Future Council did not match the official themes of the Agenda 21 NRW. The Future Council departed from a broader idea of development and quality of life, instead of from the concept of sustainable development.

As part of the Agenda 21 NRW, and in line with its first theme, the government presented a climate change policy in 2001 (MWMEV 2001). That policy backed the European and German targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and presented a series of measures to reduce emissions in North Rhine-Westphalia (covering energy, transport, industry, private households, waste, agriculture, forestry and governmental activities). While the climate change policy was explicitly presented as an intrinsic element of the Agenda 21 NRW (Höhn, 2001a: 1; MWMEV 2001: 4), it was managed by the SPD-controlled Ministry of Economy, Energy and Transport and not entirely connected to all Agenda activities. However, it is interesting to mention that one of the elements of the climate policy, i.e. renewable energies, was an important accent of the international activities on sustainable development conducted by the government between 2000 and 2005. Those international activities were controlled by the Environment Ministry.²⁷

3.3.3.2 Specificity of the goals

The goals of the Agenda 21 NRW are not specific. That was intended, since the process itself was meant to result in concrete goals for sustainable development. The goals developed by the Agenda 21 NRW vary in specificity. The working groups (cf. *infra*) were mandated to develop mission statements, goals and indicators for each of the six themes. Their reports show that each group worked in a different way (Landesregierung NRW, 2003). Some themes contain rather detailed goals and indicators (although those never contain concrete targets), while others are limited to vaguely stated goals or principles. Most themes refer in general terms to goals or targets set at the federal level (e.g. the national SDS), at the EU level (e.g. the European Kyoto target) or at the global level (e.g. the Convention on Biodiversity).

²⁷ North Rhine-Westphalia's activeness in nrg4SD was a case in point. Although it did not take part in the Gauteng event (despite the participation of Minister Höhn at the Johannesburg Summit), North Rhine-Westphalia joined the network shortly after its creation. It has always been a very active member, both at administrative and at ministerial level. Most of the initiatives taken by North Rhine-Westphalia in nrg4SD concerned renewable energy. For instance, it introduced a policy paper on renewable energy and it coordinated an online platform about the use of renewable energy at the subnational level (which is no longer accessible) (Happaerts et al., 2010: 140). Moreover, a North Rhine-Westphalian official represented nrg4SD in the steering committee of REN21, a policy network on renewable energy, in which nrg4SD seated as the voice of subnational governments. However, North Rhine-Westphalia withdrew from nrg4SD as the result of the shift in government. The focus on renewable energy is less strong in the government's current external activities. REN21 no longer has a subnational representative.

3.3.3.3 Timeframe of the goals

With regard to the timeframe of the policy goals, the original intention was to come up with concrete proposals for an SDS in 2003 (Landtag NRW, 2000a). Eventually, the final conference of the Agenda 21 NRW was held in 2003, but the government's end report was only published in 2005. As for the other operational goals of the policy, the government underlined that many results of the concrete Agenda project would only be visible on a longer term (Landesregierung NRW, 2002: 61). The goals developed *by* the Agenda 21 NRW had a rather short term in mind. Although most goals formulated by the working groups were vague, some included a timeframe of five years or less (Landesregierung NRW, 2003: 98-110). The goals developed by the Future Council, in contrast, had 2015 and 2030 as a time perspective (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a: 7).

3.3.3.4 Analysis of the situation

North Rhine-Westphalia's policy goals were not based on a real analysis of the situation. With regard to the goals developed *by* the Agenda 21 NRW, it is worth mentioning that the reports by the working groups pay significant attention to the analysis of the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia with regard to each topic, in order to contextualize the themes (Landesregierung NRW, 2003). Also the end report of the Future Council contains such an analysis, linked to targets for the future development of the *Land* (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a).

3.3.3.5 Political and societal backing for the goals

The entire idea behind the Agenda 21 NRW was to achieve a broad societal backing for a sustainable development policy in North Rhine-Westphalia. That is why it was conceived as a participatory process.²⁸ A broad range of groups were involved, including churches, schools, academics, NGOs,²⁸ labour unions, consumer organizations, the business sector, etc. During the process, Environment Minister Höhn frequently invoked the high numbers²⁹ of attendance at the different Agenda events (i.e. 800 at the launching conferences in 2002²⁹ and 1,100 at the closing conference in 2003) in order to underline the societal backing (MUNLV Landtag NRW, 2003b: 18; 2002: 3). The Agenda 21 NRW was clearly one of the most broadly undertaken participation processes for sustainable development.

The political backing for the Agenda 21 NRW was the single most important weakness of North Rhine-Westphalia's sustainable development policy. Many interviewees confirm that the process was never full-heartedly supported by the SPD. More generally, the two political terms were marked by intense conflicts between the two coalition partners - sometimes in the form of personal battles between Green Minister Höhn and the Prime Minister (Nagel, 2006: 350) - and the SPD reportedly "despised" the Greens (Nagel, 2006: 347). The discussion on the policy framing of sustainable development showed that from the outset, the Greens were the ones promoting an Agenda initiative. It also pointed out that there were some differences in the SPD's and the Greens' interpretation of sustainable development. Moreover, the Greens continuously emphasized that the project would be a new landmark in North Rhine-Westphalia's (environmental) policy, while the Socialists were quick to stress that it was in line with what the

²⁸ However, it is striking that one of the major environmental NGOs in North Rhine-Westphalia, NABU (Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union), refused to be involved in the Agenda 21 NRW, because it anticipated that it would not produce any changes in the government's policy.

²⁹ The attendance for each of the six launching conferences (cf. *infra*) fluctuated between 107 and 149 participants (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 12).

SPD governments had been doing for years (Landtag NRW, 1998a). After the institutionalization, it was the Green Party, headed by Minister Höhn and her team at the Environment Ministry, who led the Agenda 21 NRW. As a consequence, the Agenda 21 NRW and all the initiatives and institutions associated with it were completely identified as a 'Green' project. As intensifying conflicts brought the coalition near break-up before the 2005 elections (Nagel, 2006: 348), interviewees state that the drawing up of an end report was a challenge. That also explains why there was never a closing parliamentary debate about the Agenda 21 NRW. While the Agenda 21 NRW was thus never fully supported by the SPD, it was openly attacked by the opposition parties, most prominently by the CDU, who led the opposition against the red-green tandem - in Düsseldorf but as from 1998 also in Berlin. As stated before, as soon as the red-green parties were out of power, the Agenda 21 NRW, and sustainable development as a political concept at large, disappeared from the policy scene. As a consequence, the policy goals developed by the Agenda 21 NRW were never acted upon.

3.3.4 Concluding remarks

The analysis of policy goals in North Rhine-Westphalia shows an uncommon situation in which the sustainable development policy, institutionalized as the Agenda 21 NRW, was in itself intended to develop policy goals. In a two-level effort of goal-setting, the goals of the sustainable development policy are rather weak and little concrete. They are the fragile result of a long debate and difficult bargaining between the SPD and the Green party. They focus mostly on the participatory approach that underlies the entire Agenda process, and on the concrete projects that are meant to anchor sustainable development in societal thinking. The goals developed by the Agenda 21 NRW are stronger with regard to some characteristics, and would be appropriate as the goals of a sustainable development policy. They contain both short-term and long-term objectives on a variety of key issues, and they are more or less based on an analysis of the situation. The problem is that they were never acted upon. While a broad and deep support was the entire intention of the Agenda 21 NRW, its low political backing meant the death sentence for a sustainable development policy in North Rhine-Westphalia.

3.4 Policy instruments

3.4.1 Institutional instruments

3.4.1.1 Committee of Undersecretaries for Sustainable Development and Agenda Agents

One of the main instruments of the government's sustainable development policy was the Committee of Undersecretaries for Sustainable Development (*StaatssekretärInnen-Ausschuss für nachhaltige Entwicklung*).³⁰ Created in January 2001 (MUNLV 2002: 2), the Committee brought

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At the outset, the Committee was referred to as 'green cabinet', in reference to similar institutions created elsewhere, for instance in the UK in the 1990s. However, according to interviewees, the SPD later blocked the official use of that term in North Rhine-Westphalia. After North Rhine-Westphalia, a similar committee was established at the federal level in Germany (Fils, 2007: 167).

together eight ministries at the undersecretary level.³¹ The Committee was the main (and only) instrument for horizontal coordination with regard to sustainable development, and had the task of steering the entire Agenda 21 NRW process (MUNLV 2005: 5). It prepared the main decisions taken by the government in 2000 and 2001 on how the Agenda 21 NRW would be organized and managed (cf. Landtag NRW, 2001: 2). The coordination task of the Committee of Undersecretaries was supported by Agenda Agents (*Agenda-Beauftragten*) in each of the eight ministries (MUNLV 2005: 5). Those were administrative officials at a lower level than the undersecretaries, who coordinated the day-to-day follow-up of the Agenda 21 NRW within their own ministries. Interviews reveal that, both at the undersecretary and at the agent level, some of the ministries were very inactive in the coordination process.

3.4.1.2 Agenda Agency

When it was decided that the Environment Ministry would be responsible for the execution of the Agenda 21 NRW, an administrative unit was created within the Ministry in May 2001 to provide the necessary support. The Agenda Agency (*Geschäftsstelle Agenda 21 NRW*) was a sub-unit of the Ministry, which employed two and later three officials (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 34; Höhn, 2001a: 4). It supported the work of the Agenda Agents and provided the secretariats of the Committee of Undersecretaries and of the Future Council (Höhn, 2001a: 4). It also maintained a website³² and developed a two-monthly electronic newsletter (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 27; MUNLV 2002: 5). The Agency was supported by an external management consultancy, Booz Allen Hamilton, which took care, *inter alia*, of the PR and of the organization of the different events (Höhn, 2001a: 4).

After the 2005 shift of power, the Agenda Agency was merged into one of the units of the Environment Ministry, i.e. the Division for Cross-sectoral Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development. That division became responsible, among other things, for education for sustainable development and for the *Allianz für die Fläche* (cf. 3.1.3).

3.4.1.3 Core working groups

After the launch of the Agenda 21 NRW, six core working groups (*Kernarbeitsgruppe*) were set up by the Committee of Undersecretaries in April 2002 (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 25). For each of the six themes, a group between six and seventeen experts was mandated to develop mission statements, objectives and indicators (MUNLV 2005: 29-31). This institutional instrument was meant to be the first step of a new planning cycle, as the mission statements, objectives and indicators were intended to sow the seeds of a future SDS. The experts were selected from the scientific world, business, civil society and the administration, but also included people involved in the Agenda projects (cf. *infra*) (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 25; MUNLV 2005:

³¹ In Germany, undersecretaries (or 'state secretaries') are the heads of a ministry. It is an administrative function, but often filled-in by political colour (Niestroy, 2005: 138). The participating ministries were the Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (MUNLV), the Ministry for Economy, Entrepreneurs, Energy and Transport (MWMEV), the Ministry for Schools, Science and Research (MSWF), the Ministry for Employment and Social Policy (MASQT), the Ministry for Urban Development, Living, Culture and Sports (MSWKS), the Ministry for Women, Youth, Family and Health (MFJFG), the Finance Ministry and the State Chancellery (*Staatskanzlei*) (Höhn, 2001a: 1-2). After 2001, however, the Finance Ministry was no longer a member (cf. Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 33). The Ministries for Justice and for Internal Affairs were not involved. The MUNLV, which presided, and the MWMEV were both represented by two members (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 33).

³² The website (www.agenda21nrw.de) is no longer available.

8, 29-31). After the Agenda conferences (cf. *infra*), each core working group developed a paper containing mission statements, objectives, indicators and concrete policy recommendations. In doing so, they were asked to organize workshops and work in close consultation with other experts and societal groups (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2002: 25; MUNLV 2005: 8). In the summer of 2003, the papers were made available to the broader public for an online consultation. The core working groups completed their task in 2003, when their final document (Landesregierung NRW, 2003) was presented at the closing conference and subsequently delivered to the government.

3.4.1.4 Future Council

In July 2001, Prime Minister Clement and Environment Minister Höhn called into being the Future Council (MUNLV 2002: 4). They nominated 26 prominent personalities from North Rhine-Westphalia to seat in it, and two more were nominated in 2003 (Landtag NRW, 2003c: 15). According to the Greens' broad view on participation, the Future Council included members from all divisions of society - e.g. scientists, business representatives, politicians, civil servants, representatives of religious groups, but also a soccer coach and an actress. Both genders were equally represented. The Future Council convened thirteen times between October 2001 and February 2004 (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a: 45). Its task was to give conceptual and substantive assistance to the Agenda 21 NRW, and to advise the government on the future development of North Rhine-Westphalia. It also had to contribute to the publicity of the Agenda 21 NRW among the broader public (MUNLV 2002: 5). As mentioned before, the Future Council was independent from the rest of the process. That was reflected in its choice of themes, which did not mirror the themes or goals of the Agenda 21 NRW. At the outset, the Council defined three themes: demographic issues (and their impact on social policy), economic issues (including resource efficiency, innovation and jobs) and education (MUNLV 2002: 5). A fourth theme, 'liveable NRW' (dealing with sports, culture, nature, etc.), was subsequently added (MUNLV 2005: 9). For each theme, a working group within the Council was set up, which each delivered a paper to the government (Landtag NRW, 2003c: 15-16). The collection of those papers was published in an end report in 2004, which presents the Future Council's vision on growth and prosperity in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2015 and beyond (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a: 5).

The Future Council is in many aspects comparable to the numerous sustainable development advisory councils that have been established elsewhere (cf. Niestroy, 2005). Minister Höhn maintains that the idea of a Future Council in North Rhine-Westphalia preceded the establishment of the German Council for Sustainable Development, created in April 2001 (Landtag NRW, 2003c: 16). The North Rhine-Westphalian government also emphasized that the creation of the Future Council was 'unprecedented' (MUNLV 2005: 9), pointing towards its unique membership, whereas other councils are often composed of experts in sustainable development issues only. The heterogeneous membership of the Future Council was at the same time its main weakness. Since it was composed of prominent representatives from very different societal groups, interviews reveal that they had many difficulties to agree on common recommendations for the *Land's* future development. According to interviews, some observers therefore felt that the Agenda 21 NRW was a costly 'discussion exercise'. Minister Höhn herself admitted that the Future Council had some problems with regard to the availability of the members and conflicts between them, and that it ran less smoothly than the other elements of the Agenda 21 NRW (Landtag NRW, 2003b: 16; 2003c: 16). That is illustrated by the fact that two members quit the Council before its dissolution in 2004.

3.4.1.5 Other institutions

Besides the aforementioned institutions, some other institutional instruments have been created in the context of the government's sustainable development policy. On the one hand, two institutions have been set up outside the governmental sphere, but in the name of the Agenda 21 NRW. The first is the Environment and Development Foundation (SUE, *Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen*). The SUE was created by the government in 2001. Financed with revenues from a lottery, it supports projects for NGOs in the area of environment and development (recalling the basic mission of UNCED). The second is the State Agency Agenda 21 NRW (LAG21NRW, *Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Agenda 21 NRW*). The government created LAG21NRW in 2001, through a project submitted to the Environment Ministry for funding. It was aimed at supporting the Local Agenda 21 initiatives of North Rhine-Westphalian municipalities, and financed projects for municipalities and NGOs on a broad range of sustainable development issues (current priorities include climate change, biodiversity and land use). The LAG21NRW also took over many of the tasks fulfilled by the Agenda Transfer agency mentioned before (cf. 3.1.1), which was abolished in 2006. Both the SUE and the LAG21NRW still exist.

On the other hand, the Efficiency Agency (EFA, *Effizienz-Agentur NRW*) is worth mentioning. It was established by the Environment Ministry in 1998 (before the Agenda 21 NRW was launched, and outside of its context), but often mentioned in the governmental discourse on sustainable development. EFA offers advice to small and medium-sized enterprises on resource efficiency and broader issues of a 'sustainable economy'. Together with the SUE and the LAG21NRW, it is the only institutional instrument created by the red-green coalition that survived the shift of governments.

3.4.2 Legal instruments

No legal instruments were used in the government's sustainable development policy. The Agenda 21 NRW never resulted in legislative proposals, although that was announced in 2000 (cf. supra).

3.4.3 Economic instruments

The Agenda 21 NRW was accompanied by a sound budget of around five million EUR per year (Finanzverwaltung NRW, 2000; 2001; 2004).³³ For the fiscal years 2002 and 2003, it was a little over six million (Finanzverwaltung NRW, 2002; 2003). The funds were used for research activities and for the organization of the different events, and as subsidies for the Agenda projects. Moreover, a large part of the budget of the Agenda 21 NRW was versed to municipalities and local organizations, in the framework of Local Agenda 21 activities. No other specific economic instruments were deployed in the Agenda 21 NRW, although the reorientation of the economy was a major part of the policy framing of the government's sustainable development policy.

In their opposition against the Agenda 21 NRW, the CDU and the FDP regularly attempted to cut the budget of the process. The FDP found that "much money [was] squandered on 'green playing fields'" (Landtag NRW, 2003b: 17, own translation).

³³ The budget of the Agenda 21 NRW appeared in the section 'general attributions' (*allgemeine Bevilligungen*) of the budget of the Environment Ministry. It has to be noted that the subsidies for other institutions, such as the SUE or the EFA, belonged to other budgets.

3.4.4 Information instruments

The Agenda 21 NRW was to a large part oriented towards communication and information, meaning that the use of information was an important part of the government's strategy to achieve the goals of its policy. That is why many of the institutional instruments, for instance, also fulfilled information tasks. Examples are the website and newsletter developed by the Agenda Agency, or the different documents that were developed in the process. Other information instruments are developed below. It needs to be mentioned that most of the information instruments, i.e. the online tools and the documents associated with the Agenda 21 NRW, were gradually made unavailable after 2005, and many of them are no longer accessible.

3.4.4.1 Activating consultation and conferences

The core of the government's communication strategy with regard to the Agenda 21 NRW was embodied by a series of conferences held in 2002 and 2003. In preparation of the first conferences, and of the Agenda 21 NRW in general, a basic activating consultation was conducted by Booz Allen Hamilton in December 2001 and January 2002. Around 200 stakeholders were interviewed with regard to their expectations of the Agenda 21 NRW (Landesregierung NRW, 2002: 62-63).

In February and March 2002, six Agenda conferences were organized, each around one of the themes of the Agenda 21 NRW. Those conferences were presented by the government as the real launching events of the process (Landesregierung NRW, 2002: 10). They thus occupied an important place among the government's information instruments, as they were meant to gain and withhold the much needed participation of the societal groups, and also to publicize the Agenda 21 NRW among the public. After the conferences, a four-pillar model was designed to structure the Agenda 21 NRW, and formally adopted by the Committee of Under-secretaries (see Figure 1). For then on, the Agenda 21 NRW was presented as a process resting upon the following dimensions: Agenda projects, Agenda networks, Best practice examples and Mission statements, objectives and indicators (MUNLV 2005: 6). While the latter were already mentioned under institutional instruments (cf. 3.4.1.3), the Agenda projects and networks are elaborated under voluntary approaches (cf. *infra*). The best practice examples are presented in the following section.

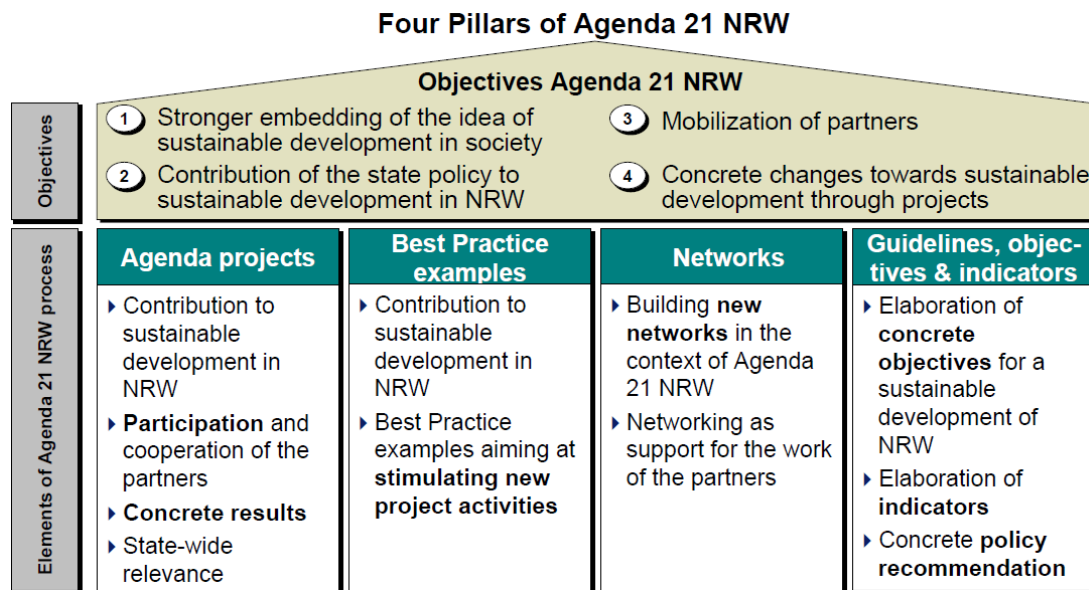


Figure 1 The four-pillar model of the Agenda 21 NRW (source: Booz Allen Hamilton, 2003: 17)

A final two-day conference was organized to officially close the Agenda 21 NRW in November 2003. It was meant to again gain broad publicity among the public, and to assure that the achievements of the process would be carried further by stakeholders.

3.4.4.2 Best practice examples

The government wanted the Agenda 21 NRW to be a stimulus for further action on sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia, also after the end of the process. That is why information instruments were so important. Towards the end of the process, the government called for proposals on concrete results (e.g. from the Agenda projects, cf. infra) to be labelled as a 'best practice examples'. 170 proposals were submitted, of which 70 were selected. The selection criteria were the innovative character, the contribution to sustainable development and the transferability. The selected 'best practices' were documented on the internet, in the hope that they would be imitated by other stakeholders (MUNLV 2005: 8).

3.4.4.3 End reports

Although the initial intention of the Agenda 21 NRW was to produce legislative proposals for the administrative and political transposition of the results (cf. supra), those proposals were never made, due to the political problems that were already touched upon in the analysis. Instead, the results of the Agenda 21 NRW were reported in two important information instruments: the end report of the Future Council on the one hand (Landesregierung NRW, 2004a), and a general end report by the Environment Ministry on the other hand (MUNLV 2005). Those two documents reflect the substantive achievements of the different initiatives of the Agenda 21 NRW. The end report of the Environment Ministry was explicitly meant as a first impulse for a SDS. Interviewees suggest that the process of drafting that report was one with many difficulties, as it was done in the final months running up to the 2005 elections.

3.4.5 Voluntary approaches

In the political debate running up to the Agenda 21 NRW, the conclusion of voluntary yet binding agreements with the business sector was a major point of interest. That priority gradually disappeared, in favour of concrete societal projects. Still, those projects reveal a preference to achieve sustainable development through the use of voluntary approaches. The practice-oriented approach of the Agenda 21 NRW is visible in the four-pillar model (see Figure 1). When that model was designed in 2002, three of the four pillars embodied those concrete initiatives: the Agenda projects, the Agenda networks, and the Best practice examples. The aim of the Agenda projects and networks was to make sustainable development tangible, but also to attract the necessary public and media attention to the Agenda 21 NRW (Landesregierung NRW, 2004b: 2; Landtag NRW, 2003c: 14).

After the Agenda conferences, stakeholders were asked to submit project proposals within each of the six themes of the Agenda 21 NRW. Out of 130 proposals, the Committee of Undersecretaries selected 52 projects (Landesregierung NRW, 2004b: 5). In its selection, the Committee looked at the opportunity of the project to achieve concrete results and thus have *Land-wide* relevance (Landtag NRW, 2003c: 14). The projects were officially started in April 2002, and in July the project coordinators received their formal acknowledgement by the government in the form of a certificate. The 52 projects were very diverse. Some were managed by a single actor, while others were lead by a partnership of different stakeholders. Projects have been proposed by companies, NGOs, universities, churches, governmental agencies, etc. In many cases they were new, but several projects had already been established before the Agenda 21 NRW. Examples of projects range from the development of a new gas motor, over the organization of a sustainable investment fair, to the introduction of a new fair trade label. The theme 'climate change and sustainable mobility', had the most projects (fifteen), while 'social policy' had none (Landesregierung NRW, 2004b). The preliminary achievements of the projects were presented at the closing conference in 2003. Besides the 52 projects, five so-called Agenda networks were acknowledged.³⁴ The focus in those networks was on the linkages that were made between different partners.

While the concrete projects were presented as the greatest asset of the Agenda 21 NRW, they were criticized as its major weakness at the same time. The Greens attached much importance to the fact that the Agenda projects assured that the government's sustainable development policy would exceed the scope of the administration and have a concrete impact on the ground. They always expressed a strong belief in the power of bottom-up initiatives for sustainable development. The opposition parties, in contrast, depicted the Agenda 21 NRW as nothing more than a loose collection of costly projects, without any governmental strategy behind it (cf. Landtag NRW, 2003b). Furthermore, some of the non-governmental stake-

³⁴ An example was ÖKOPROFIT (which stands for 'ecological project for integrated environmental technique'). It was originally developed by the Austrian city of Graz, but was later diffused across Germany. The Agenda 21 NRW reportedly contributed to the success of the project in North Rhine-Westphalia (Landesregierung NRW, 2004b: 118). ÖKOPROFIT is above all a network between companies and municipalities, who work together with other partners on concrete projects, sometimes linked to Local Agenda 21s. The projects in ÖKOPROFIT are aimed at economic efficiency and environmental protection, through energy savings and the responsible use of resources. Companies often use the ÖKOPROFIT projects as a steppingstone towards EMAS or other certifications. While the Environment Ministry was the coordinating partner of the network in the framework of the Agenda 21 NRW, ÖKOPROFIT continued to be supported by the Ministry after 2005. That happened under the denominator of 'sustainable economy', while references to the Agenda 21 NRW were not made (MUNLV 2006).

holders that were asked to give their opinion on the Agenda 21 NRW in a parliamentary commission, stated that the results of the Agenda projects were positive, but that real political action needed to follow in order to develop a substantive sustainable development policy (Landtag NRW, 2003a).

3.4.6 Concluding remarks

The analysis shows an emphasis on information instruments and on a form of voluntary approaches, with the establishment of some institutional instruments to guide the process. Although it was originally intended, no legal instruments were used. Moreover, despite the strong emphasis on the economy in the policy framing, no specific economic instruments were designed. Most instruments were aimed at intervening outside the governmental sphere, although the contribution of governmental policy to sustainable development was one of the explicit goals of the policy. The development of the instruments reflects the project-oriented approach of the Agenda 21 NRW, and the absence of efforts made to establish a structural, programmatic sustainable development policy. While some of the instruments could and should have continued to function, such as the Committee of Undersecretaries, others were clearly designed with a limited lifespan, such as the core working groups. Also the Future Council had a mandate that was explicitly limited in time, and which distinguished it from other, structural, sustainable development advisory councils elsewhere that continue to advise governments on targeted issues. The choice for a temporary project-oriented approach with no sequel, implies a lack of support from both inside and outside the government. That lack of support is also illustrated by the inactivity of some ministries in the coordination mechanisms. Eventually, only some of the institutions which were established without strong connections to the Agenda 21 NRW subsist, such as the SUE and the LAG12NRW. All other instruments have disappeared and were not replaced by a comprehensive sustainable development policy.

3.5 Explanatory factors

3.5.1 International factors

While Brundtland did not have concrete effects in North Rhine-Westphalia, the Rio Summit did have some resonance. Its influence on the institutionalization of sustainable development by the subnational government, however, was rather indirect. Rio stimulated many North Rhine-Westphalian municipalities to develop a Local Agenda 21, and stirred up ideas for NGOs and certain Green members of parliament who were represented at the Summit. Those factors ultimately led to the launch of the Agenda 21 NRW. As Rio's influence was rather indirect, there was no perception that North Rhine-Westphalia needed to comply with international obligations. While the Agenda 21 NRW was first launched as a SDS, it never really became one. Rather, its status was later weakened to a process resulting in recommendations that needed to lead up to a subsequent SDS. Although the concept and the discourse of Rio's Agenda 21 was enthusiastically taken over in Düsseldorf, UNCED was perceived as a role model rather than as an international requirement. The Agenda 21 NRW was conceived more as a bottom-up initiative, than as a top-down pressure.

The Johannesburg Summit, in contrast, did not seem to have any impact at all, although Environment Minister Höhn represented North Rhine-Westphalia there. Of course, at the time of the Summit, the major decisions regarding the Agenda 21 NRW had already been taken. Moreover, interviews point out that in Johannesburg, Minister Höhn invested her resources above all in development cooperation, which was recently added to her portfolio.

With regard to the promotion of policy models, there are not many direct references to international policy processes in North Rhine-Westphalia. However, the influence of the international discourse is obvious, for instance with regard to the interpretation of sustainable development. The North-South dimension, always one of the key issues on the international sustainable development agenda, was a crucial element in the Agenda 21 NRW. The same goes for the participatory approach. The three-pillar vision promoted by Rio is also present in the North Rhine-Westphalian framing, but that never attains high visibility. With regard to the choice of themes for the Agenda 21 NRW, no references to international policy are made, but every one of the themes relates to the chapters of Rio's Agenda 21. In the goals developed by the Agenda 21 NRW, some references to international policy goals are made.

In contrast to the global sustainable development regime, the EUSDS had no impact in North Rhine-Westphalia. There are two reasons for that lack of influence. First, the timing of the process made such influence unlikely. The first EUSDS was decided in 2001, when the Agenda 21 NRW had already been launched. Second, my interviews revealed that North Rhine-Westphalian officials and stakeholders are largely unaware of the existence of the EUSDS.³⁵ Other European initiatives, in contrast to the EUSDS, do have an influence. For instance, the attraction of EMAS had a significant impact on the policy framing of sustainable development.

Some references are made to policy copying in the North Rhine-Westphalian case, but mostly in the negative sense. For instance, while the question whether North Rhine-Westphalia should copy Bavaria's environmental pact had a large impact on the policy framing of sustainable development, no lesson-drawing from Bavaria actually took place - at least not until the Christian Democrats rose to power in 2005. Furthermore, in parliamentary debates Minister Höhn sometimes referred to SDSs in other countries (such as Austria, the Netherlands or the UK) to push for the Agenda 21 NRW (e.g. Landtag NRW, 1998a: 8015). The analysis suggests, however, that concrete lesson-drawing from those countries did not take place. Instead, it was sometimes emphasized how one of the instruments of the Agenda 21 NRW, i.e. the Future Council, was "without predecessor" (MUNLV 2005: 9, own translation).

3.5.2 Degree of autonomy

With 12/15 (see Table 4), North Rhine-Westphalia has a lower score on self-rule than the Canadian provinces or the Belgian Regions. It also ranks a little lower than many other European subnational governments, especially due to a lower fiscal autonomy (2/4) (see Hooghe et al., 2008b).

³⁵ Niestroy (2005: 152-153) talks of a general German culture of not according a large role to the EU unless very specific policy issues are at stake. The latter cannot be said of the EUSDS.

Table 4 Degree of self-rule of North Rhine-Westphalia (data from Hooghe et al., 2008b)

Components	Score
Institutional depth (0-3)	3
Policy scope (0-4)	3
Fiscal autonomy (0-4)	2
Representation (0-4)	4
Total (0-15)	12

Nevertheless, the relatively high policy scope (3/4) allows North Rhine-Westphalia to design a policy with a broad range of themes, which is manifested in the thematic areas of the policy goals. On the other hand, it was observed that the Agenda 21 NRW did not make use of the full potential of North Rhine-Westphalia's self-rule. For instance, only few economic instruments were used, and no legal instruments were applied.

Jørgensen (2012) states that, despite their high score on institutional depth (3/3), the policy-making autonomy of the German *Länder* with regard to key issue areas for sustainable development is limited (e.g. regarding industry, energy, transport), because most of those domains fall under the category of concurrent legislation and are often regulated at the federal level. That means that they are largely compelled to implement policies within national (and European) frames. That is visible, for instance, in the climate policy, which departed from European and German targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But while that is true for specific policy areas, it is striking that the *Länder* do not play a role in the implementation of the German sustainable development policy as a meta-policy. For instance, the national SDS does not contain concrete incentives for lower levels to act (Tils, 2007: 168), and it did not trigger new developments at the *Länder* level (Niestroy, 2005: 141).³⁶ In North Rhine-Westphalia's case, of course, timing plays a role here too. When the national SDS was launched in 2002, the Agenda 21 NRW was already running towards its end. Nevertheless, even afterwards the two processes were unrelated (cf. Bachus et al., 2005: 233). North Rhine-Westphalia's sustainable development policy was thus not influenced by federal policy-making.

3.5.3 Political context

In the case of North Rhine-Westphalia, the political context is key to understand the specificities of the sustainable development policy. The analysis has shown that the results are to a large degree shaped by political party dynamics.

The debate on the desirability of a sustainable development policy was actually stirred up by the Christian Democrat opposition after 1995, when they wanted to provoke the new red-green coalition to take a 'Bavaria-like' initiative for an environmental pact. They failed, but their provocations triggered debates between the three political parties on a future sustainable development policy for North Rhine-Westphalia. From early on, most political will for such a policy, and more specifically for a *Land*-wide Agenda 21, was observed at the level of the Green party. The Greens already wanted to take an initiative to implement the UNCED agenda in 1995, but failed to convince their Socialist coalition partner. During the coalition talks in 2000, in contrast, the issue had become unavoidable due to the previous parliamentary discussions, and the Greens managed to inscribe the Agenda 21 NRW in the coalition agreement. However, the process was never truly supported by the SPD. Also at the administrative

³⁶ The lack of vertical policy integration with regard to sustainable development in Germany is elaborated in Happaerts (2012a).

level several ministries remained largely inactive. The sustainable development policy suffered heavily from that narrow backing. It became a rather weak process without any structural results. The decisions that were taken after 2005 were revealing in that regard. The new coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals made a complete *tabula rasa* of the previous sustainable development initiatives. It underscored that the sustainable development policy was identified as 'Green fiddling'.

It is also clear in the North Rhine-Westphalian case that political ideologies had a decisive influence on the content of the sustainable development policy. The analysis showed that each of the political parties had a distinct idea about what sustainable development is and how it should be put into practice. Even the use of the word 'sustainable development' appeared to be politically sensitive in North Rhine-Westphalia. The way in which the policy was eventually institutionalized, was the result of a compromise between the Socialist and the Green party, and it was also influenced by the parliamentary debate stirred up by the CDU. The FDP, in contrast, did not have an influence as it was not represented in parliament between 1995 and 2000, when the lion's share of the debate took place. However, the analysis also suggests that, as the policy became more concrete, the preferences of the Green party gradually overtook the influence of the other parties. The policy framing of sustainable development, shaped through parliamentary debates, was a compromise between the Green party, the SPD and the CDU. In the definition of policy goals and their thematic areas, a consensus between the Socialists and the Greens was observed. But in the concrete realization of the Agenda 21 NRW and its policy instruments, the preferences of the Greens were especially manifest. That is why, for instance, the emphasis on a participatory approach and on a North-South dimension were so strong. Moreover, the Greens pushed through their preferred interpretation of voluntary approaches, and they paid significant attention to the deployment of institutional instruments, in order to leave a mark during their participation at the executive level.

3.5.4 Socioeconomic conditions

In contrast to political dynamics, the economic performance of North Rhine-Westphalia was never really felt as an obstacle in putting sustainable development on the agenda. It never appeared in interviews, policy documents or political debates as a hindrance. That is partly because North Rhine-Westphalia, as an economic motor of Germany, was never perceived to be in severe economic hardship at the time. Furthermore, soon after the concept appeared in political debates, it was easily linked to North Rhine-Westphalia's *Strukturwandel*. That was visible in the policy framing, where sustainable development was interpreted as the management of the *Land's* resources, and especially as an opportunity for innovation and for job creation. However, the link with the *Strukturwandel* was hardly visible in the selection of policy goals and instruments. While North Rhine-Westphalia's policy framing was strongly economic, the rest of the policy was not.

In political debates, moreover, it was often emphasized by political actors how North Rhine-Westphalia is an important industrial entity, and the major energy producer of Germany, and that those basic economic characteristics needed to be taken into account in North Rhine-Westphalia's approach to sustainable development. That suggests that the attachment to those socioeconomic features of North Rhine-Westphalia might have influenced the lack of willingness by some actors to truly inscribe sustainable development in the structural change of the *Land*, for instance by attaching goals and instruments to that interpretation.

4. The sustainable development policy of North Holland

4.1 Institutionalization of sustainable development

4.1.1 The Dutch sustainable development policy and the role of the provinces

When it comes to long-term strategic planning for sustainable development, the approach of the Dutch national government has been considered as pioneering (Jänicke and Jörgens, 1998: 32-33). Since the adoption of the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP) in 1989, the Netherlands is labelled a front-runner (Niestroy, 2005: 208). The NEPP and its successors were at the time considered as the national SDS, with sustainable development being interpreted as the integration of environmental concerns into other policy areas (Lundqvist, 2004: 113; Niestroy, 2005: 209). In the run-up to the Johannesburg Summit, however, voices grew louder to develop a proper SDS next to the ‘environmental’ NEPPs. Hence, an Action Programme for Sustainable Development was developed in 2003 (Ministerie van VROM 2003a; b), but according to interviewees it had very little domestic impact and served only to accommodate international requirements. Attention for sustainable development again grew stronger after 2005. That resulted in the development of the Cabinet-wide Approach on Sustainable Development in 2008, which promoted progress on selected themes such as climate change and biodiversity (Cramer and Koenders, 2008).³⁷

In general, the Dutch provinces have no role in the national sustainable development policy (Niestroy, 2005: 205). Only in a document leading up to the Action Programme, the provinces were requested to develop their own SDS (Ministerie van VROM 2002: 72). Yet in the eventual Action Programme, that call was not repeated. The lack of participation of the provinces in the national sustainable development policy stands in contrast with the strong intergovernmental cooperation that happens within specific sectoral themes, such as environment and spatial planning, where the provinces have important responsibilities in delivering policies within nationally-defined frames. Since 2009, cooperation is also strengthened in the field of climate change (IPO and Rijksoverheid 2009).

Although they play no role in the national sustainable development policy, several provinces have taken initiatives to institutionalize the policy concept within their jurisdictions. As is explained in the next section, attention to the policy concept in North Holland is observed since the early 1990s, but its prominence as a horizontal goal is rather recent.

4.1.2 The run-up to North Holland’s institutionalization of sustainable development

Sustainable development has been present in the political discourse in North Holland since the period following the Rio Summit (e.g. Provinciale Staten, 1993; 1995a). Although a meta-policy was not put in place, many policy sectors have paid attention to the concept. In the name of sustainable development, for instance, initiatives have been taken with regard to renewable energy. Also, sustainable development has been advanced as a guiding principle in areas such as environment or agriculture. In the process leading up the current institutionalization of North Holland’s sustainable development policy, a first decisive moment was 2003. After the provincial elections of that year, a coalition was formed between the Netherlands’ main liberal

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An overview of the Dutch national sustainable development policy is documented in more detail in Happaerts (2010a).

party (VVD), the Christian Democrats (CDA), the Green party (GroenLinks)³⁸ and a smaller liberal party (D66) (see Table 5).

Table 5 Queen's Commissioners and executive councils in North Holland since 2003

Political term	Coalition	Queen's Commissioner	Executive Councillor for Environment
2003-2007	VVD-CDA-GroenLinks-D66	Harry Borghouts (GroenLinks)	Albert Moens (GroenLinks)
2007-2011	VVD-PvdA-CDA-GroenLinks	Harry Borghouts (GroenLinks) as of 2010: Johan Remkes (VVD)	Albert Moens (GroenLinks) as of 2008: Bart Heller (GroenLinks)
Since 2011	VVD-PvdA-D66-CDA	Johan Remkes (VVD)	Tjeerd Talsma (PvdA)

It was the first time that the Green party formed part of the province's executive council.³⁹ For the Green party, sustainable development is traditionally an important political priority (cf. Provinciale Staten, 1995a: 7, 9). During the negotiations for the coalition agreement, the party chose to introduce sustainable development by means of a very concrete issue, i.e. renewable energy. The coalition agreement promises the investment in renewable ('sustainable') energy in the province's northern region, which was at the time experiencing a period of economic hardship (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2003: 14). As a tactic to make the issue of sustainable development acceptable for the other parties, the Green party successfully coupled the development of renewable energy in that region to economic growth and job creation.

After the 2007 elections, the Green party remained in the coalition, while D66 suffered heavy losses and made way for the Socialists (PvdA). The 2007 coalition agreement mentioned sustainable development for the first time as a general goal in the preamble (cf. *infra*). An interviewee reveals that the mention was an initiative of the Socialists, but that it did not arouse a particular debate. While political representatives, during my interviews, minimize the importance of the inclusion of the concept in the coalition agreement, it did incite a concrete initiative for sustainable development by the Environment administration⁴⁰ in 2009, which would eventually lead to the institutionalization of sustainable development. The initiative was stimulated by two other driving forces. First, within the administration the feeling reigned that, despite the prominent place of the concept in the coalition agreement, different interpretations of sustainable development were being applied in the province's policies. Second, the administration was driven by its perception that the provincial assembly expressed a growing sense of urgency (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). Since the 2000s, sustainable development is frequently included as a general policy requirement in the framework notes of the assembly - i.e.

³⁸ GroenLinks is the Netherlands' main green political party. There is also a smaller green party, called The Greens (*De Groenen*), but that is only of marginal importance in national and provincial politics.

³⁹ The provincial executive council or States-Deputed consists of executive councillors which are elected by the States-Provincial (the provincial assembly, which is directly elected). Both the executive council and the provincial assembly are chaired by the Queen's Commissioner (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 229). Between 2002 and 2009, the Queen's Commissioner in North Holland was delivered by the Green party (see Table 5). Yet the importance of that position needs to be nuanced, as the Queen's Commissioner is not elected but appointed by the *national* government (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 229) and the position is said to be apolitical.

⁴⁰ The provincial administration of North Holland is subdivided into four Directions. One of those, the Policy Direction, supports the executive council with regard to all aspects of policy-making. The Policy Direction consists of eleven Sectors, including the Sector Environment (hereafter: 'Environment administration').

the guidance that the assembly gives to the executive council for the formulation of policies (e.g. Provinciale Staten, 2001: 3; 2008; 2009: 13; Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008b). It reflects a widespread feeling among the political parties represented in the assembly that sustainable development must be taken into account in North Holland's policies.

The initiative taken by the Environment administration consisted of two main elements. In a first step, the administration performed an inventory of the different interpretations and applications of sustainable development in North Holland's policies. When that inventory was finalized in 2009, it was decided by the head of the Policy Direction that the Environment administration would develop a position paper on sustainable development to establish the province's view on the topic.

The position paper was heavily influenced by North Holland's participation in the provincial sustainability meter. That was an initiative taken by the national agency Senternovem to benchmark the different provinces⁴¹ with regard to which and how many initiatives for sustainable development they have taken. Provinces that wanted to participate, needed to answer a series of questions in four categories - people, planet, profit and process - which reflect the three dimensions of sustainable development supplemented by the institutional dimension. Based on their yes-or-no answers, a score was calculated for each separate dimension, and for the entire meter as such. With its score of 73%, North Holland obtained an average result (COS Nederland, 2010; Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). The Environment administration's position paper on sustainable development was finalized after the publication of the results of the provincial sustainability meter. The document, baptized 'Balance Sustainability', contained North Holland's definition of sustainable development, its scores on the provincial sustainability meter, and its policy intentions for sustainable development. It was adopted by the executive council in November 2010 (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010d: 1), thus giving political backing to the institutionalization initiative.

Summarizing, the development of the Balance Sustainability, North Holland's first transversal initiative on sustainable development, was thus triggered by a sentence in the coalition agreement, by the provincial assembly's policy frames and by the perception that a universal view was needed. It was then heavily influenced by North Holland's participation in the sustainability meter. Moreover, the development of the institutionalization initiative happened in a difficult financial and political context. Because the understanding of that context is vital for the analysis, it is briefly sketched in the following sections.

4.1.3 Decentralization: the sword of Damocles hanging over the provinces

The discussion on the role of the provinces is a debate that regularly resurfaces in the Netherlands. In 2007, it was again put on the political agenda by the new coalition agreement of the national government of Christian Democrats, Socialists and a smaller Christian Democrat party (ChristenUnie), which advanced the problem of 'administrative crowdedness' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2007: 78). The perception reigned that provinces, because of their open household,⁴² often intervene in areas which do not belong to their core competences, and thus

⁴¹ Senternovem was an agency of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. In 2010, it merged with another agency to form Agentschap NL. The provincial sustainability meter was modelled after a local sustainability meter developed in 1999 (COS Nederland, 2010). Since 2008, benchmarking is explicitly promoted as an instrument to promote better governance at the provincial level (IPO 2008: 4-5). According to interviewees, the intention is to recalculate the provincial sustainability meter every four years.

⁴² Despite the low degree of autonomy of the provinces, the Dutch Constitution grants them an 'open household', meaning that in principle they can act in every domain they want.

interfere with national or municipal policies (Bosman, 2009). A special advisory commission proposed that the provinces would focus exclusively on their core competences in the spatial and economic domain and in cultural affairs (IPO 2008: 2). That proposal was the foundation for a new administrative agreement between the national government and the provinces, concluded in 2008 (IPO 2008). The agreement was made against the backdrop of the global financial crisis and the national government's need for significant budget cuts. It is not surprising that one of the major elements of the debate was the funding of the provinces, which were perceived to spend more money than was necessary (cf. Bosman, 2009). As a consequence of the national budget cuts, the annual funding to North Holland was reduced with 70 million EUR (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009g).

The new administrative agreement confirmed the provinces' role as 'directors' in the spatial-economic domain (IPO 2008: 3), which touches upon many responsibilities important in the context of sustainable development.⁴³ It is pertinent to note here that North Holland is described by some interviewees as a typical 'core' province. That means that it is not perceived to profile itself on matters that do not strictly belong to provincial competences - i.e. it focuses on its 'core' competences - and that it is one of the least active participants in the Dutch decentralization debate. It also needs to be pointed out that North Holland does not have a pronounced territorial identity (which some other provinces, such as Limburg or Friesland, have to a small extent). In response to the new agreement, and in order to meet the national budget cuts, North Holland indeed opted to focus on its core competences. However, invoking its open household, some money was put aside for 'additional' policy areas, in which the province's contribution was considered to be of particular significance (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010c: 7-8, 15-16). North Holland's activities with regard to sustainable development (focusing mostly on renewable energy, cf. *infra*) were placed within that category (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010c: 52-53). In contrast, the social domain is the one in which the consequences of the decentralization debate are mostly visible, as North Holland does not see a role for provincial policies in social matters (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). The province's activities in the social domain will thus be cut back. For instance, North Holland explicitly chose to cancel its investment in development cooperation (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2007: 37; 2010a).⁴⁴

⁴³ The most important powers of the Dutch provinces concern spatial planning (Hulst, 2005: 100; OECD, 2002: 232). Their extensive spatial planning responsibilities give them influence in other policy domains as well. That is how the provinces have introduced the 'area-based approach' (*gebiedsontwikkeling*) (Coenen, 2012). That means that, instead of working in policy sectors, the province applies its different responsibilities in a joint approach to the development of specific areas within its territory. Those responsibilities concern spatial planning, cultural infrastructure, environment, energy, agriculture, water, economy, transport, among others (IPO 2008: 3). In that area-based approach, the province can direct the development of an area towards a long-term vision that it develops (IPO 2008: 4). An example is the province's important role in the planning of business parks (IPO 2008: 16). In general, the provinces assume a coordinating and steering role, and have enough manoeuvring space for their own policy accents. With the focus on coordination and integration (Dieperink and Driessen, 2007: 249; Driessen, 2000: 166-181), the province is often described as a 'director' (*regisseur*), especially in the context of the area-based approach. The Dutch provinces are for instance well-equipped to mobilize relevant players within a specific policy issue and stimulate interaction between them (Driessen, 2000: 165; Hendriks, 2001: 149). Yet in their role as directors, provinces are to a large extent dependent on the other levels of government with regard to certain policy instruments and financial resources (Dieperink and Driessen, 2007: 249).

⁴⁴ That decision was made during the coalition negotiations in 2007. As a compensation, the Green party demanded that the coalition agreement included a reference to the Millennium Development Goals (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2007: 37).

4.1.4 Financial crisis and political turmoil

While the global financial crisis was a significant driving force of the recent decentralization debate, it also affected North Holland in another way. The province lost 78 million EUR in savings when the Icelandic bank Landsbanki went bankrupt due to the crisis (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008f). Although a committee of inquiry of the provincial assembly judged that no infringements had been made by the executive council, the perception reigned that the councillors should have been more cautious with the investment of provincial funds. As a consequence, the executive council collectively resigned in June 2009 (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009d). A new council came into office in July 2009, containing five of the former councillors and three new members. While Queen's Commissioner Borghouts remained in office, he came under attack shortly afterwards. That happened because of a scandal that erupted in September 2009, with regard to undeclared costs made by one of the former commissioners. Borghouts resigned, and was replaced by the Liberal Remkes early 2010 (cf. Table 5) (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009b).

The shift in councils in 2009 was accompanied by a reshuffle of portfolios, which had a repercussion on sustainable development. The Climate portfolio, previously held by the Socialists, came under the control of Environment Councillor Heller of the Greens. It put an end to an ambiguous situation in which the Climate and the Sustainable Energy portfolios were controlled by different councillors.⁴⁵ After the shift, Environment Councillor Heller often referred to his unified Climate and Sustainable Energy portfolio as 'Sustainability portfolio', although that never became an official denomination. In any case, it strengthened the prevailing view that the Environment Councillor was responsible for sustainable development.

Addendum: North Holland in 2011

The 2011 provincial elections in the Netherlands were held in a difficult political context at the national level, where a minority government of Liberals and Christian Democrats came into office in October 2010, supported by the far-right, nationalist PVV. The provincial elections were above all important for the national context, as the provincial assemblies elect the upper chamber of the Dutch parliament. In North Holland, the Christian Democrats lost half of their seats, while the PVV entered the provincial assembly for the first time. As the Liberals were once again the biggest party, they took the lead in forming a new executive council. They decided to exclude the Green party, in favour of the liberal D66 (cf. Table 5), because they judged the election programme of the Greens as being too distant from their own (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2011c).

In the new executive council, the Environment portfolio has been given to Councillor Talsma of the Socialist party (cf. Table 5), who also becomes responsible for Spatial Planning. For the first time, the Energy and Environment portfolios are separated. The Climate and Sustainable Energy portfolio is now controlled by the Christian Democrat Councillor for Agriculture (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2011a). The new coalition agreement shows some commitment to sustainable development, focusing especially on renewable energy (but it excludes new onshore wind energy projects, cf. *infra*) (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2011b).

The initiatives and policies after the 2011 elections are not taken into account in the analysis.

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Interviewees suggest that the creation in 2007 of a Climate portfolio, in addition to the existing Energy portfolio, was made to accommodate the demand of the Socialist party to have a climate-related competence. The Energy portfolio, in contrast, remained in the hands of the Environment councillor, as it has always been in North Holland. In 2007, the Energy portfolio was renamed 'Sustainable Energy'.

4.2 Policy framing

4.2.1 Different interpretations of sustainable development

It was stated before that the concept of sustainable development has been present in North Holland's political discourse since the early 1990s. The interpretation of the concept, however, was never uniform. While sometimes a clear reference was made to the consideration of future generations (e.g. Provinciale Staten, 1995b: 5), in most instances it seemed that the adjective 'sustainable' was merely placed in front of policy areas, such as 'sustainable agriculture' or 'sustainable building' (e.g. Provinciale Staten, 1995a: 9). My interviews confirm the use of diverging interpretations, for instance among the executive councillors. While the first Green councillor clearly favoured a framing of sustainable development within the context of climate change, one of the Christian Democrat councillors stated that, as far as her responsibilities were concerned, 'sustainability' meant 'taking measures of no regret'. Other interviews pointed towards the predominant use of an interpretation of 'sustainable' as 'something that stays'.

The diverging interpretations of sustainable development gave rise to the Environment administration's initiative to perform an inventory of the different applications in the province's policies. According to informal documents, the inventory showed that at least five interpretations were common. First, sustainable development is often narrowly interpreted as the fight against climate change, with measures focusing on energy and on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008b). Second, some policy areas explicitly refer to the three pillars of sustainable development, for instance by advancing the so-called three 'Ps' (People, Planet and Profit) (e.g. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2002: i; 2008c: 7). Third, sustainable development is sometimes defined as taking into account the needs of future generations (e.g. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009a: 3). Fourth, in water and coastal policy, sustainability is commonly framed as a problem of safety, to be understood in the context of rising sea levels (e.g. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009g). The fifth interpretation, finally, refers to an integral approach to policy-making. However, in many cases a policy sector is saturated with the adjective 'sustainable', without any substantive interpretation being given to the concept (e.g. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008e). That is why, based on the inventory, the administration concluded that a clear and uniform definition was needed.

4.2.2 Climate change and sustainable energy

Before analyzing the current framing promoted by the Environment administration, it is pertinent to elaborate on the first of the five interpretations mentioned above, which clearly dominated policy debates in North Holland. Sustainable development was most often framed within the context of the province's response to climate change. Part of the explanation is that in North Holland, the common term for renewable energy is 'sustainable energy', and in political debates sustainable development is often equated with it because of the lexical kinship. That narrow framing of sustainable development originated with the Green party's coupling of renewable energy and job creation in the 2003 coalition agreement (cf. *supra*). It was further strengthened by Environment Councillor Moens, who retained the Energy portfolio and who made renewable energy (especially wind energy) his personal priority. Interviewees show that mentions of sustainable development in that period always referred to North Holland's efforts to combat climate change, and to the province's - and the Councillor's - ambition to be a leader with regard to wind energy. The framing is also illustrated by North Holland's participation in the nationally-financed programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development' (*Leren voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling*). Created in 2003, that programme is intended to anchor sustainable

development within the provinces by investing in capacity-building and financing projects to promote sustainable development. North Holland's ambition statement for the programme was in fact the first policy document adopted by the executive council under the denominator of sustainable development (Senternovem, 2008). The document is entirely focused on climate change. It intends to bridge the gap between the general approach on sustainable development as a meta-policy promoted by the national government, and the provincial climate policy.

North Holland's focus on climate change has historical roots, but it is also a logical consequence of the province's physiognomy. On the one hand, North Holland's geographical situation makes it extremely vulnerable to some of the predicted consequences of climate change (cf. Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 7-8), being entirely surrounded by water and with the largest part of its territory below sea level. On the other hand, the province's peninsular geography offers many opportunities for the exploitation of wind resources. Furthermore, an additional explanation of North Holland's focus on climate change, in my view, has to do with its scope of competences. Because of their relatively high autonomy within the domain of spatial planning, the Dutch provinces are important partners in those measures against climate change that involve a significant spatial dimension, e.g. coastal protection (adaptation) or wind energy production (mitigation). It is one of the domains where the provincial level can make a difference, which explains why North Holland invests in it.

4.2.3 The current interpretation of sustainable development

As mentioned before, the recent effort to institutionalize sustainable development was put in motion by the 2007 coalition agreement. The passage reads as follows:

"We aim for building and development, besides promoting employment and increasing accessibility. Moreover, we opt for an efficient use of space and we explicitly take into account the consequences for the surroundings, the environment and climate. Economy and ecology powerfully in balance. We want to promote the coherence between all domains where sustainability needs to take shape and innovation plays a large role therein" (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2007: 3, own translation).⁴⁶

Entitled 'Powerful, in Balance', the coalition agreement's leitmotiv was finding a good equilibrium between different sectoral goals, and sustainable development was framed in that context.

Subsequently, North Holland's policy framing of sustainable development was concretized when the provincial assembly developed a framework note for a new environmental policy plan in 2008. In the note, the assembly defined sustainable development as "finding the balance and coherence between man, environment and economy (triple P), for now and in the future (time dimension), here and elsewhere (spatial dimension)" (Provinciale Staten, 2008: 8, own translation). That definition - i.e. the three-pillar vision complemented by the consideration of future generations (intergenerational solidarity) and other parts of the world (intragenerational solidarity) - is also common in the national government's framing of sustainable development (cf. Ministerie van VROM 2003b: 5, 11). It was also promoted by the programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development' (Senternovem, 2004: 11). In the environmental policy plan that was subsequently developed by the Environment administration, which needed to take into account the assembly's framework note, one of the two overarching goals is "the stimulation of sustainable development in North Holland for now and in the future,

⁴⁶ As this quote shows, the common term used in North Holland is '*duurzaamheid*' ('sustainability') rather than '*duurzame ontwikkeling*' ('sustainable development').

without externalization of environmental burdens elsewhere” (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 4, own translation). The plan repeated the vision of the three Ps, stating that the strongest combination of the three dimensions must be sought, through the decoupling of economic growth and environmental pressures (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 21). When the plan was adopted by the executive council, the province’s interpretation of sustainable development was also publicized on its official web page. On the website, the province specified that sustainable development is about making the right assessment between the three Ps: “Sustainable development is that development in which the assessment between the three Ps has explicitly been made. The development on one P cannot come at the expense of one of the other Ps” (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010b, own translation).

The same policy framing was subsequently repeated in the Balance Sustainability. The document advances the Brundtland definition and emphasizes the balance between the three Ps and the need to avoid externalization to other places or to future generations. Simultaneously, the Balance Sustainability refers to the recent decentralization debate (cf. *supra*), and announces that, as a consequence, the People dimension will receive little to no attention from the province (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

4.2.4 Governance model

Characteristics of two governance models are found in the North Holland case. On the one hand, the model that is applied recalls the environmental integration model. In line with the traditional framing of sustainable development in the Netherlands (cf. 4.1.1), the policy departs from an environmental perspective and is led by the Environment administration, before ‘greening’ other policy sectors. It is illustrated by the addition of ‘sustainable’ in front of sectoral policies, and by the dominant interpretation of that adjective as ‘climate-friendly’. On the other hand, the recent policy framing imposes a holistic governance model upon North Holland. Especially the fact that sustainable development is interpreted as the simultaneous consideration of the three Ps points towards that model. That is in line with the executive council’s focus on ‘balancing’ different sectoral goals during the 2007-2011 term. The adoption of the Balance Sustainability is presented as a move towards a broadening of the scope of sustainable development, away from an environmental (climate-related) interpretation (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a; b).

Nevertheless, in the case of North Holland the governance model is not a clear-cut issue. That is due to the fact that not many instruments accompany the recent shift towards a broader policy framing (cf. *infra*). Moreover, although the Environment Councillor refers to his Climate and Sustainable Energy portfolio as the ‘Sustainability portfolio’, the responsibility of the broader issue of sustainable development is not clearly assigned at the political level. At the level of the administration, the dossier is led by the Environment administration, while the important decisions are made by the head of the Policy Direction (cf. 40).

4.2.5 Concluding remarks

As the concept of sustainable development frequently emerged in North Holland’s policy discourse since the 1990s, different interpretations of the issue competed with each other. It pushed the Environment administration to perform an inventory and adopt a formal definition, which follows the interpretation that is dominant in the Netherlands, i.e. focusing on the three Ps (People, Planet, Profit) and the avoidance of externalization towards other parts of the world or future generations. The promotion of that framing was especially fostered by the 2007 coalition agreement, which framed sustainable development as a solution for the problem

of imbalance or incoherence between different policy goals. The search for a better equilibrium is illustrated by the title of the recent institutionalization effort (*'Balance Sustainability'*).

4.3 Policy goals

4.3.1 Strategic policy goals

Although the Balance Sustainability is the first significant initiative to institutionalize sustainable development in North Holland, it does not formulate new strategic policy goals. Rather, the most prominent strategic goal with regard to sustainable development is put forward by the 2007 coalition agreement, which emphasizes the aim to achieve policy coherence between different domains (cf. *supra*). The objective of coherence was reinforced by the environmental policy plan of 2009, where sustainable development became a strategic priority. The plan stated that the province seeks "the right balance between building, developing, employment, accessibility, land use, surroundings, environment and climate" (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 21, own translation). The importance of policy coherence was again emphasized in North Holland's Structure Vision. As stipulated by the new Dutch law on spatial planning, all provinces needed to produce such a Structure Vision, containing their long-term vision and strategic choices with regard to spatial policy in their territory. Because of the important provincial responsibilities with regard to spatial planning, the document is particularly suited for the formulation of strategic goals, especially considering its 2040 time horizon. North Holland's Structure Vision departs from the idea that space is a scarce resource in the province. North Holland has an extremely high population density (981 inhabitants/km²), which is often invoked by interviewees as an obstacle towards sustainable development. The greatest challenge of spatial planning in North Holland is thus to achieve a 'balance' in the various uses of that space (housing, industry, agriculture, recreation, energy production, etc.). The Structure Vision formulates three main strategic interests: spatial quality, sustainable land use, and climate resistance (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 15). Following the trend in North Holland to include 'sustainable' in many policy formulations, the Structure Vision thus includes 'sustainable' ambitions which underscore the province's aim for better coherence between different goals.

4.3.2 Operational policy goals

The Balance Sustainability does formulate some operational policy goals. Those goals are entirely based on North Holland's score on the provincial sustainability meter (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a), which demonstrates the large influence of that exercise on the province's sustainable development policy. A previous version of the document - developed before the results of the sustainability meter were published (cf. *infra*) - invoked a number of criteria to identify policy areas in which new goals would be formulated. For instance, priority would be given to those policy areas where the province can make a real difference. However, in the final version of the Balance those criteria are not further mentioned. Rather, the ambitions that are formulated mostly depend on whether they would increase North Holland's score on the sustainability meter (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). The document announces enforced ambitions in four areas: sustainable land use, sustainable transport, sustainable business parks and sustainable procurement (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). With regard to other relevant policy areas (e.g. energy), the Balance Sustainability merely states that existing provincial policy goals should continue to be implemented.

Another important operational goal formulated by the Balance Sustainability is the establishment of a 'policy framework'. That should define guidelines for sustainable development that could be used in all policy and decision-making processes. That goal is particularly aimed at contributing to more policy coherence (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

In addition to those objectives advanced by the Balance Sustainability, some of the actions formulated by the Structure Vision could be regarded as operational policy goals for sustainable development. Of particular importance is the objective to develop guidelines for sustainable land use (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 108).

4.3.3 Goal characteristics

4.3.3.1 Thematic areas of the goals

The Balance Sustainability promotes a thematically broad application of sustainable development, as it is based on the provincial sustainability meter's interpretation of the concept in four dimensions: People, Planet, Profit, and Process. The document promises increased efforts with regard to land use, transport, business parks and procurement, and it suggests progression on the process dimension by establishing guidelines or decision-making criteria for sustainable development. Moreover, the Balance Sustainability backs existing policy goals with regard to energy, agriculture and water policy. All those thematic areas relate to elements measured in the provincial sustainability meter.

The focus on land use or spatial planning, as indicated above, is justified by the provincial competences. It also relates to the area-based approach, in which provinces combine their different responsibilities in a joint approach to the development of specific areas (cf. footnote 43). A good example is the planning of business parks, which North Holland frequently invokes as an important topic for sustainable development. In the context of business parks, the focus on sustainable development implies above all that all existing spaces are used with a maximum efficiency, before new terrains are converted into business parks (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2007: 6). The Structure Vision also attaches other criteria to sustainable business parks, e.g. energy use (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 142).

Energy and climate change are not included as a priority area in the Balance Sustainability, because that document is explicitly aimed at broadening North Holland's interpretation of sustainable development (away from a climate-oriented framing) (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a), and because the province already scored well on that topic in the sustainability meter. Nevertheless, it is still one of the most prominent themes of North Holland's sustainable development policy, for the different reasons elaborated above (cf. 4.2.2). It is also an area where the province frequently expresses its ambition to emerge as a leader, especially with regard to wind energy production (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 17; 2010e: 12). Another area where North Holland emphasizes its front-runner position, is on sustainable agriculture, for instance regarding biological agriculture or sustainable greenhouse farming (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2007: 10; 2010a).

North Holland furthermore gives a prominent place to its role as a client, consumer and investor. That is reflected in ambitions concerning sustainable procurement, the province's own use of carbon neutral buildings and transport, and sustainable investments (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 17; 2009f; g; 2010a; Senternovem, 2008: 12). The focus on sustainable development in the context of investments was stimulated by North Holland's problems after the financial crisis and the cautious approach that resulted from them (cf. *supra*).

As mentioned above, North Holland does not consider social matters as core provincial competences. Moreover, it sees no role for itself in 'globalization issues' or the international dimension of sustainable development (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). That is how it justifies its low score on the People dimension of the sustainability meter. Nevertheless, North Holland intends to score better on that dimension in the future. The thematic area that will be used for that cause is culture (or cultural history). Culture is related to the social dimension of sustainable development, and according to North Holland, some of the province's typical characteristics (e.g. wind production) can be used to engage the population in sustainable development (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

4.3.3.2 Specificity and timeframe of the goals

The goals of North Holland's sustainable development policy are not clear or specific. That is because the Balance Sustainability only announces some reinforced ambitions in certain policy areas, while merely repeating goals in other areas. As the goals lack specificity, there is no time-frame attached to them either. The ambitions with regard to sustainable development that are anchored in the Structure Vision are an exception, as they are associated with a long-term vision of how North Holland should look like in 2040 (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 12).

4.3.3.3 Analysis of the situation

Instead of an analysis of the situation, the Balance Sustainability includes a detailed analysis of North Holland's scores on the provincial sustainability meter, thus drawing the 'balance' of its policy initiatives with regard to sustainable development. The analysis of global and local trends and challenges that is lacking in the Balance, is present in the Structure Vision. In order to identify the challenges for spatial planning in North Holland in the coming 30 years, the document analyzes three main trends expected to have heavy implications in the province: globalization, climate change and demographic changes (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010e: 7-11).

The environmental policy plan also contains an analysis of the situation, emphasizing above all the different environmental policy-making trends at various levels of governance. The increased attention for sustainable development is included as a major global trend to be reckoned with (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 16). Furthermore, in its operationalization of sustainable development as a strategic priority, the plan suggests that the Ecological Footprint might be used as a measuring instrument in the future (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 21). That was a consequence of a discussion within the provincial assembly, where some parties wanted the environmental policy plan to include the objective that North Holland would contribute to a reduction of global environmental burdens, measured by the Ecological Footprint (Provinciale Staten, 2008: 9). Interviews reveal that Environment Councillor Heller vetoed that use of the Footprint, against his own party's intentions. The eventual plan merely mentions North Holland's Footprint (with 4.6 gha/capita the third largest among the Dutch provinces), and states that energy use and transport have the largest contribution, but it does not promote the Footprint as a regular measuring instrument (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009c: 22).

4.3.3.4 Political and societal backing for the goals

The process leading up to the institutionalization of sustainable development has shown that the province's initial attention for the concept, and also the popular framing in the context of renewable energy and climate change, were promoted by the Green party. Interviewees (including political representatives from different parties) explain how the Greens were the

only partner in the coalition to continuously emphasize sustainable development. They also suggest that most resistance came from the Liberal party and, to a lesser extent, the Christian Democrats. That is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that the Liberals pronounced themselves against more onshore wind energy in North Holland during the last election campaign (VVD, 2011).

The interpretation of sustainable development that is included in the Balance Sustainability, however, has a broad political backing, because the provincial assembly adopted it in its framework note for the environmental policy plan (Provinciale Staten, 2008: 8). However, with regard to the operational goals, it must be emphasized that the Balance Sustainability - despite the fact that it was triggered by a phrase in the coalition agreement - was a purely administrative initiative. Although the executive council took note of it and thus backed its institutionalization, that happened without any political discussion, as interviewees confirm. Only the Green Councillor had some discussions on it with the Environment administration, since it was considered to pertain to his portfolio.

The societal backing for the sustainable development policy is doubtful, as the recent initiatives did not entail a participatory approach. The Balance Sustainability does mention, however, that stakeholder bodies in North Holland recently pleaded for a move towards a broader interpretation of sustainable development, away from a narrow framing in the context of climate change (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

4.3.4 Concluding remarks

On a strategic level, North Holland's sustainable development policy is meant to contribute towards greater horizontal policy integration. The province seeks increased policy coherence, as diverging sectoral interests come together in a difficult socioeconomic context. The pursuit of policy coherence is particularly crystallized in the challenges of spatial planning. The difficulty that those challenges pose are visible in North Holland's ambition to formulate decision-making criteria for sustainable development.

However, the province's operational goals are almost entirely aimed at increasing its score on the provincial sustainability meter. It makes that those goals are very weak, unspecific, and not attached to a timeframe or an analysis of the situation. Furthermore, the goals expressed in the Balance Sustainability have a doubtful political and societal backing.

4.4 Policy instruments

4.4.1 Institutional instruments

4.4.1.1 Balance Sustainability and Sustainability Driver

The Balance Sustainability, the centrepiece of North Holland's institutionalization of sustainable development, is the only real instrument that was specifically created for the new sustainable development policy. When comparing the final version of the Balance to previous versions drafted by the Environment administration (done by means of informal documents and interviews), certain weaknesses are observed. For instance, the specification that sustainable development entails an explicit assessment between the three Ps - which is also publicized on North Holland's website (cf. 4.2.3) - disappeared from the final version. The Balance was heavily influenced by the provincial sustainability meter and by North Holland's reinvigorated focus on its core competences, which came at the expense of other elements. Also the ambition to profile North Holland with regard to sustainable development has disappeared from

the final version. While the inclusion of concrete actions in a previous version - which had the working title 'Agenda Sustainability' - made that the document was clearly a planning instrument, the current Balance Sustainability actually brings it close to a purely informational instrument. It rarely exceeds the scope of window-dressing, displaying what the province already does with regard to certain themes, although it had only a mediocre score on the sustainability meter.

The development of the Balance Sustainability was accompanied by the designation of an administrative official within the Environment administration as a programme manager, called 'Sustainability Driver' (*Aanjager Duurzaamheid*). However, no real institutional changes were made as a consequence of the institutionalization initiative.

The Balance Sustainability repeats the reigning perception that North Holland lacks criteria to orient all policy and decision-making processes towards sustainable development (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). It refers to a recurring discussion on the need of a 'policy framework' for sustainable development. Already in the early 1990s, discussions were held in the provincial assembly to adopt a sustainability impact assessment, but that never materialized (Provinciale Staten, 1993). During the two previous decades, the need for a policy framework for sustainable development repeatedly emerged in policy debates. For instance, North Holland's ambition statement for the programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development' (cf. supra) already mentioned that "a strategy" would be developed "to anchor sustainable development administratively and organizationally in the heart of the province" (Senternovem, 2008: 6, own translation). In 2009, the province announced that a policy framework for sustainable development would be developed to operationalize and measure sustainable development in North Holland (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009e: 26). When the Balance Sustainability was being formulated, some were in favour of letting it evolve into such a policy framework, after the example of some other provinces who had already adopted a similar strategy document (e.g. Provincie Limburg, 2009). Eventually, however, the Balance did not become a policy framework, but it does repeat the intention to develop one in the near future (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a). That intention is linked to the particularly low score that North Holland obtained on the Process dimension of the provincial sustainability meter, because clear and explicit sustainable development criteria are absent in most policy domains (COS Nederland, 2010; Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

4.4.1.2 Other planning instruments

While the institutional instruments for sustainable development are thus weak, it is important to note, as was explained above, that sustainable development can and sometimes does emerge within other planning processes in the province, most importantly in the context of spatial planning and the area-based approach.

4.4.2 Legal instruments

There are no legal instruments in North Holland's sustainable development policy. The Dutch provinces, for that matter, do not have legislative competences.

4.4.3 Economic instruments

Interviews and policy documents show a strong preference in North Holland for economic instruments for sustainable development. The dominant view is that the government cannot impose sustainable development, but that it can stimulate and facilitate it, and that it must set

the example too. The preference for economic instruments is visible in several types of initiatives.

Setting the example as a client and consumer, the executive council has adopted a new procurement policy for North Holland in 2009. It stipulated that procurement by the province would be oriented towards sustainable production and corporate social responsibility (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009f). Similarly, the province wants to be 100% 'carbon neutral', by using renewable energy as much as possible and by carbon offsetting (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008a: 5).⁴⁷ A current project where the exemplary role of the province should become visible is in the restoration of the administration's housing, which must become the province's most 'sustainable' building (COS Nederland, 2010; Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010a).

The use of economic instruments for sustainable development also means that North Holland uses some of the financial resources that it has at its disposal for the purpose of sustainable development. Most of the resources that the Dutch provinces have, come from national government grants, but they also collect part of their funds (about 10%) autonomously, through their own taxes (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 218).⁴⁸ For their part, they give subsidies to local governments and the private sector. They thus become intermediaries in the transfer of large amounts of money, and thus have some leverages to promote sustainable development. Broadly, North Holland says to give about 10% of its subsidies to measures for sustainable development (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2008d: 8-9). One example of subsidies given to sustainable development goals is the programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development' (cf. supra).⁴⁹ Another example is North Holland's 'Sustainable Tuesday' (*Duurzame Dinsdag*), a yearly initiative worth 30,000 EUR at which the province awards a prize to the best sustainable development initiative developed by citizens or companies.

As mentioned before, North Holland also introduced sustainable development in its investment policy, as a consequence of the problems that arose during the financial crisis (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2009g). That decision not only entailed using investment funds to promote sustainable development, but also being more cautious with provincial money. During the previous political term, the investment in sustainable development initiatives focused above all on renewable energy. An example is the Development Fund Sustainable Energy (*Ontwikkelingsfonds Duurzame Energie*), meant to invest in small and medium-sized companies that want to produce renewable energy in North Holland. Furthermore, interviewees explain that the province frequently collaborates with other levels of government to invest in renewable energy projects.

Many of the economic instruments are aimed at supporting the private sector. Another important example is North Holland's participation in the annual European Wind Energy Conference. With an investment of 200,000 EUR, North Holland repeatedly has the largest stand on that fair, thereby offering the opportunity to companies to be represented (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010c: 53). The initiative is meant to support small and medium-sized enter-

⁴⁷ Interviewees explain that that objective has practically been achieved, thanks to the province's financial participation in offshore wind energy projects.

⁴⁸ The share of their revenues that the provinces collect autonomously, are accumulated through a provincial surcharge on the national vehicle tax. The surcharges of North Holland are the lowest of all provinces. In recent political debates, some parties such as the Green party pleaded for an increase of the surcharge, in order to invest, for instance, in public transport. Other parties, most importantly the Liberal party, are against such an increase and want North Holland to keep the lowest taxes in the Netherlands.

⁴⁹ For an investment of 105,000 EUR made by the province, the programme grants 308,000 EUR of national subsidies to North Holland.

prises, but also to promote North Holland - especially its Northern region (cf. 4.1.2) - as the ideal investment ground for wind energy projects.

4.4.4 Information instruments

Some of the previously mentioned instruments clearly serve as information instruments for North Holland's sustainable development policy. Most importantly, the Balance Sustainability reads more than a mission statement than as a genuine planning instrument. The province's web page for sustainable development could also be considered as a part of a very low-profile information campaign (see Provincie Noord-Holland, 2010b).

Moreover, some of North Holland's economic instruments are also aimed at broadening the understanding of and support for sustainable development, especially North Holland's participation in the programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development' and its 'Sustainable Tuesday'. Besides their character as economic instruments, they are also meant for sensitization purposes.

4.4.5 Voluntary approaches

While much emphasis is placed on the collaboration with the private sector (e.g. through the economic instruments), no specific voluntary approaches have been found in the case of North Holland. Concerning transition management, although it originated in the Netherlands, and although the national government includes the provinces in the implementation of its approach in specific policy areas (Ministerie van VROM 2001), the impact on the provincial sustainable development policies is unclear. While a previous environmental policy plan in North Holland mentioned its participation in the national approach on transition management as a means to achieve sustainable development (Provincie Noord-Holland, 2002: 177), no recent reference has been found, and transition management is not applied in the context of the recent institutionalization initiative.

4.4.6 Concluding remarks

Looking at North Holland's most prominent strategic goal, aimed at achieving greater horizontal policy integration, one could have expected a focus on institutional instruments, meant to strengthen the consideration of sustainable development in different policy sectors. Yet North Holland has failed to produce such instruments to this date. Instead, the focus on economic instruments advances another view, in which the province facilitates sustainable development through the use of its economic resources and its role as a client, consumer and investor.

4.5 Explanatory factors

4.5.1 International factors

In the analysis of the North Holland case, absolutely no backlash of the international sustainable development regime or sign of any international legitimacy pressures have been found. As a most obvious illustration, the Brundtland Report or the Rio Summit are not mentioned in

North Holland's policy documents.⁵⁰ Moreover, from my interviews it appears that provincial officials are generally unfamiliar with international policy processes such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) or the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EUSDS). The reason for that lack of international influence is plain.⁵¹ North Holland simply states that international policy developments are none of its concern.⁵¹ Therefore, the follow-up of international sustainable development policy is entirely a matter for the national government in the Netherlands. As a consequence, while several initiatives to institutionalize sustainable development as a meta-policy have been taken at the national level, North Holland has only been occupied with the different specific themes associated with sustainable development. Only very recently, a modest initiative has been taken for sustainable development as a meta-policy.

North Holland's view that international policy developments, in general, do not concern it, was already expressed in 2007 with the decision to abolish the provincial activities for development cooperation. Subsequently, the recent decentralization debate brought North Holland to sharpen the focus on its core competences, and to declare its refusal to invest in 'globalization issues', and social affairs more broadly, because those are not provincial competences. Nevertheless, although North Holland does not feel addressed by international sustainable development policy, it is aware of the fact that intragenerational solidarity is an intrinsic part of any sustainable development policy. That is illustrated by the fact that the avoidance of externalizations of environmental burdens elsewhere forms part of the official definition of sustainable development.

A single trace of transnational communication has been found in the discussion on a possible 'policy framework' for sustainable development, when policy officials in interviews refer to initiatives taken by other provinces (e.g. Limburg). Also, it must be noted that the provincial sustainability meter, the benchmarking initiative by Senternovem which has triggered action in North Holland, was partly aimed at benchmarking and lesson-drawing among the provinces.

As North Holland invokes the distribution of powers to justify its disinterest in international policy developments, this explanatory factor is strongly linked to the degree of autonomy.

4.5.2 Degree of autonomy

With a score of 8/15 on the degree of self-rule (cf. Table 6), North Holland has a low degree of autonomy. That favours a policy that is restricted in several aspects. Although recently a broad policy framing is promoted, sustainable development was for a long time narrowly focused on renewable energy, and still today the policy goals show a focus on a few selected themes only. Moreover, only a limited repertory of instruments is used. That is partly explained by the low degree of autonomy. The fact that the Dutch provinces, with a comparatively low score on institutional depth (2/3), do not have legislative powers restricts the use of legal instruments. Nevertheless, the case of North Holland shows that even a subnational government with a low degree of self-rule can take initiatives to conduct a transversal sustainable development policy within the areas of its competence.

⁵⁰ As an exception, in some of the early debates within the provincial assembly, the Brundtland Report is mentioned, for instance when discussing the proposal for a sustainability impact assessment (cf. 4.4.1.1). But such mentions have disappeared in recent debates.

⁵¹ Exceptions are, of course, instances of EU hard law, but their impact is mostly indirect through national legislation.

Table 6 Degree of self-rule of North Holland (data from Hooghe et al., 2008b)

Components	Score
Institutional depth (0-3)	2
Policy scope (0-4)	2
Fiscal autonomy (0-4)	1
Representation (0-4)	3
Total (0-15)	8

While North Holland's policy scope is already quite low (2/4), the recent decentralization debate reinforced the exclusive focus on its core competences. While North Holland has traditionally been a 'core' province anyway, the recent discussion on the provincial core competences further restricted the scope of thematic areas of policy goals for sustainable development.

North Holland has a very low fiscal autonomy (1/4), because about 90% of its financial resources are national government grants (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 218). Although that contributes to a low degree of self-rule, it does make the province an important intermediary of large amounts of money (cf. *supra*). The distribution of that money actually appears to be one of the province's most important tasks. When spending its financial resources, North Holland has a certain degree of freedom that can be used in the pursuit of sustainable development. It favoured North Holland's focus on economic instruments for sustainable development. It also promoted a dominant view on the role of the province as a facilitator (rather than an enforcer) of sustainable development, which is similar to the general view in the Netherlands on the role of provinces as 'directors'. The proper (although limited) taxation powers of North Holland (related to the 10% of resources that it collects autonomously) have not been applied in its sustainable development policy.

One of the areas where the provinces do have important competences is spatial planning. Those competences, and the area-based approach that is associated with them, are visible in North Holland's sustainable development policy. The focus within the thematic areas on sustainable business parks and on wind energy are both explained by those competences. The analysis also suggested that, in contrast to the Balance Sustainability, the Structure Vision was a very important and high-level policy initiative. That document gives evidence of a difficult exercise to reconcile diverging interests within a very limited territory, but sustainable development has to a certain degree been taken into account.

The low degree of self-rule of the Dutch provinces would suggest that, instead of designing their own policies, they play a larger role in the implementation of national policies. However, while they are indeed involved in the execution of national policies with regard to several specific policy areas, the provinces are ignored in the national initiatives with regard to sustainable development as a meta-policy. Nevertheless, the analysis did show that national influences have sometimes played a significant role in North Holland's sustainable development policy. For instance, the definition of sustainable development that is currently applied is also the one that is used and promoted by national government agencies.⁵² And more importantly, the benchmarking initiative of Senternovem, the provincial sustainability meter, has been one of the major triggers of North Holland's Balance Sustainability, and it has had a large influence on its policy framing and the selection of its policy goals. Hence, in contrast to the low influence

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In the context of the programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development', for instance, trainings are organized for provincial officials on how to interpret and apply sustainable development.

of international factors, it seems that legitimacy pressures from the national government and initiatives taken at the national level do have a significant influence in North Holland.

4.5.3 Political context

The analysis has suggested that there is a general lack of political will in North Holland to take a genuine, far-reaching initiative towards the institutionalization of sustainable development. For instance, no fundamental institutional instruments have been created, despite the perception, which is widespread since the early 1990s, that a policy framework is needed to adopt criteria to orient all policy and decision-making towards sustainable development. The Balance Sustainability, predominantly driven by the administration, never received broad outspoken political support. On the positive side, it might be a guarantee of its continuity in cases of political turnover.

Among the parties in executive power, only the Green party has shown the true will to take policy initiatives for sustainable development. More broadly, the debate on sustainable development oftentimes seems to oppose right-wing and left-wing parties. That opposition is even noticeable in the diverging interpretations of sustainable development that circulate. On the other hand, it is also the Green party, more specifically the personal preference of its first Councillor, that was responsible for the narrow framing of sustainable development in the sense of wind energy.

As opposed to the executive council, the provincial assembly has more frequently manifested broad political backing for sustainable development. It is to a significant degree because of the assembly's attention for sustainable development that the Environment administration was pushed to take an initiative for sustainable development. It then used the mention of sustainable development in the 2007 coalition agreement as its main steppingstone, although that phrase has never been politically significant for the executive council.

4.5.4 Socioeconomic conditions

When the Green party was included in the provincial coalition for the first time in 2003, it chose to introduce sustainable development in the coalition by making a strategic association between sustainable development (focused on climate change and renewable energy development) on the one hand, and economic revival and job creation for North Holland's northern region on the other hand. It is a first observation of how socioeconomic conditions can affect sustainable development policies. The focus on climate change is furthermore nurtured by threats of rising sea levels that are intrinsic to the Western part of the Netherlands. Also other elements of North Holland's socioeconomic structure explain parts of its sustainable development policy. Because North Holland, a province centred around the country's number one city and airport and a major seaport, has a strong business orientation, as interviewees stress, it is not surprising that the focus on sustainable business parks is traditionally one of the major elements of its sustainable development policy. It also explains why many of the economic instruments are directed at supporting the private sector.

Furthermore, North Holland is a province with an extremely high population density. As emphasized by interviewees, that constitutes a major challenge in many policy areas. The analysis has shown that it was mostly manifested in the development of the Structure Vision, in which the province had to reconcile diverging interests regarding land use on a very restricted territory. Those reconciliations are related with a general concern in North Holland for horizontal policy integration, which has shaped its pursuit of sustainable development.

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List of interviewees

Wallonia

Brahy, Vincent	19 March 2010	first attaché at State of the Environment Direction; Operational Directorate-General of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment; Public Service of Wallonia
De Backer, Serge	1 September 2009	consultant at CAP Conseil
de Kerckhove, Bruno	9 June 2008	first attaché at Environmental Coordination Department; Directorate General for Natural Resources and Environment; Ministry of the Walloon Region
Desgain, Xavier	28 April 2010	member of parliament (Écolo) at Walloon Parliament
d'Huart, Marie	1 September 2009	consultant at CAP Conseil
Lagrou, Klaas	16 March 2010	adviser at cabinet of the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Sustainable Development and Civil Service in charge of Energy, Housing and Research of the Walloon Government
Petitjean, Marianne	25 March 2010	attaché at Pollution Prevention Direction; Operational Directorate-General of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment; Public Service of Wallonia
Pitance, Benoît	17 December 2008 and 15 March 2010	attaché at cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Affairs, Environment and Tourism of the Walloon Government (between 2007 and 2009)
Rivez, Jean-François	16 March 2010	adviser at cabinet of the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Sustainable Development and Civil Service in charge of Energy, Housing and Research of the Walloon Government
Rouxhet, Frédéric	26 March 2010	secretary at Conseil wallon de l'Environnement pour le Développement durable
Stévenne, Jacques	21 May 2010	first adviser at Environmental Policy Direction; Operational Directorate-General of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment; Public Service of Wallonia
Vaessen, Alain	21 May 2010	special delegate at Secretariat-General; Public Service of Wallonia
Wauthier, Jean-Marie	11 June 2008	director at Environment Desk; Directorate General for External Relations; Ministry of the Walloon Region

North Rhine-Westphalia

Ellerbrock, Holger	1 April 2009	member of parliament (FDP) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Höhn, Bärbel	27 October 2009	Minister for Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection (Die Grünen) of the North Rhine-Westphalian Government (between 1995 and 2005)
Jansen, Dirk	30 January 2008	policy officer at BUND North Rhine-Westphalia (Friends of the Earth Germany)

Leifer, Christoph	20 September 2007	adviser at cabinet of the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of the North Rhine-Westphalian Government
Märkert, Hans-Christian	30 January 2008	policy adviser at Department of Cross-Sectoral Environmental Affairs and Sustainable Development; Ministry of the Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Nagel, Bernd	31 March 2009	head of division at Bureaucracy Reduction, Economic Affairs and Environment Division; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Neugebohrn, Eberhard	2 April 2009	manager at Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen
Ortgies, Friedhelm	2 April 2009	member of parliament (CDU) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Pawlowski, Sibylle	29 October 2009	head of division at Environment, Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Division; North Rhine-Westphalian Representation in Berlin
Rommel, Johannes	20 September 2007	member of parliament (Die Grünen) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Reuter, Klaus	30 March 2009	manager at Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Agenda 21 NRW
Schulze, Svenja	1 April 2009	member of parliament (SPD) at Parliament of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Stolper, Ernst-Christoph	30 January 2008	head of department at Department of Cross-Sectoral Environmental Affairs and Sustainable Development; Ministry of the Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia
Tumbrinck, Josef	31 March 2009	president at NABU NRW

North Holland

Arkes, John	21 April 2009	sector manager Environment at Policy Division; North Holland Province
Binnema, Harmen	22 April 2009	group chairman (GroenLinks) at provincial assembly North Holland
Donker, Hilde	29 July 2008	policy adviser European Affairs at Sector Administrative Development, Strategy and Europe; Policy Direction; North Holland Province
Engel, Fleur	25 May 2010	senior climate policy adviser at Environment Sector; Policy Division; North Holland Province
Heller, Bart	7 April 2011	Councillor (GroenLinks) of the executive council of North Holland group chairman (GroenLinks) at provincial assembly North Holland (between 2003 and 2007)

Koot, Yolande	21 April 2009 and 25 May 2010	strategic policy adviser at Environment Sector; Policy Division; North Holland Province
Kruisinga, Rinske	7 October 2009	Councillor (CDA) of the executive council of North Holland
Moens, Albert	23 April 2009	Councillor (GroenLinks) of the executive council of North Holland (between 2003 and 2008)
van Arendonk, Rolf	23 April 2009	policy officer at Milieufederatie Noord-Holland